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WARRIORS

THE RISE OF SCOURGE



ERIN HUNTER

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CREATED BY
ERIN HUNTER

WRITTEN BY
DAN JOLLEY

ART BY
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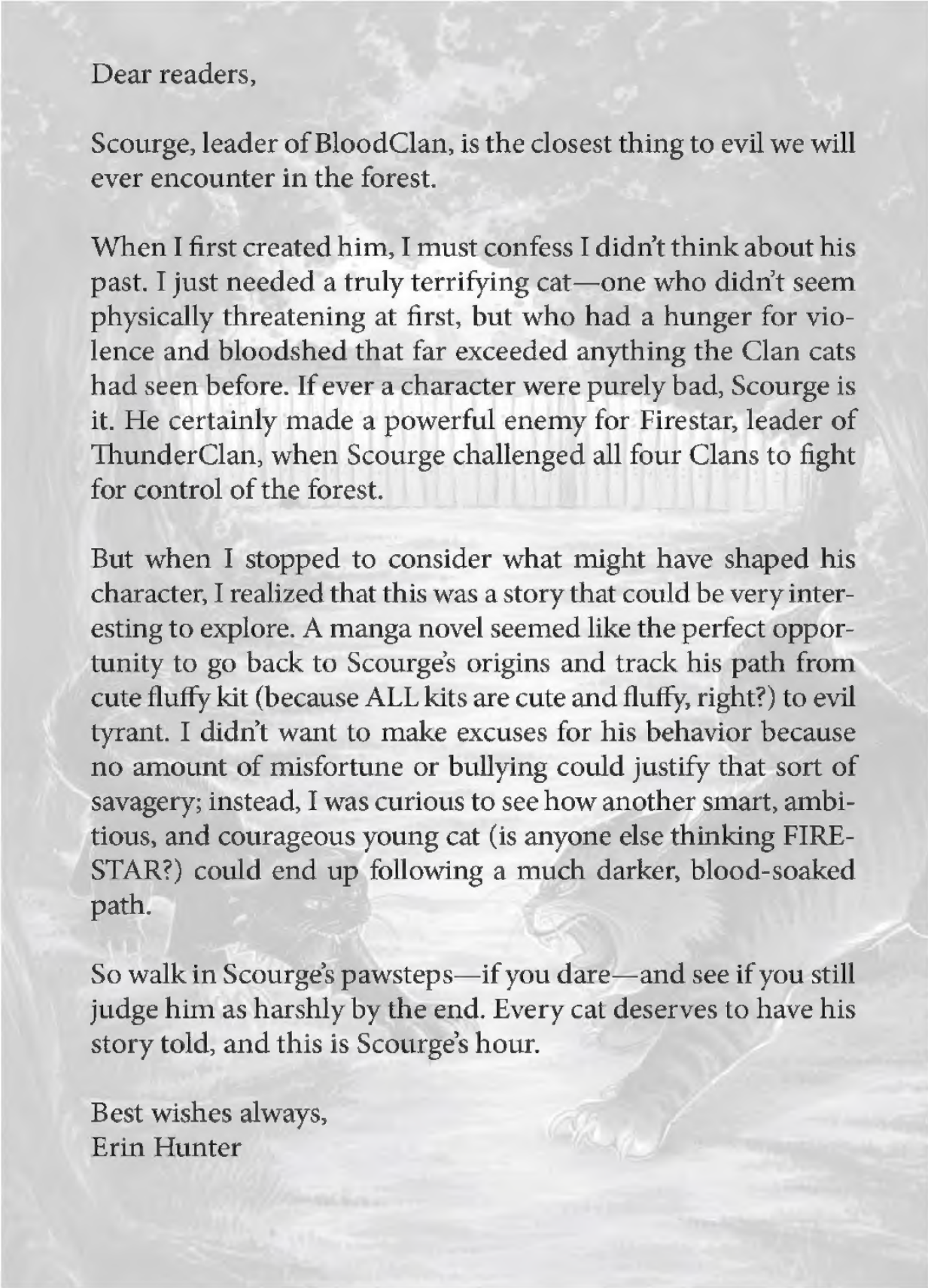
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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



First Edition



Dear readers,

Scourge, leader of BloodClan, is the closest thing to evil we will ever encounter in the forest.

When I first created him, I must confess I didn't think about his past. I just needed a truly terrifying cat—one who didn't seem physically threatening at first, but who had a hunger for violence and bloodshed that far exceeded anything the Clan cats had seen before. If ever a character were purely bad, Scourge is it. He certainly made a powerful enemy for Firestar, leader of ThunderClan, when Scourge challenged all four Clans to fight for control of the forest.

But when I stopped to consider what might have shaped his character, I realized that this was a story that could be very interesting to explore. A manga novel seemed like the perfect opportunity to go back to Scourge's origins and track his path from cute fluffy kit (because ALL kits are cute and fluffy, right?) to evil tyrant. I didn't want to make excuses for his behavior because no amount of misfortune or bullying could justify that sort of savagery; instead, I was curious to see how another smart, ambitious, and courageous young cat (is anyone else thinking FIRE-STAR?) could end up following a much darker, blood-soaked path.

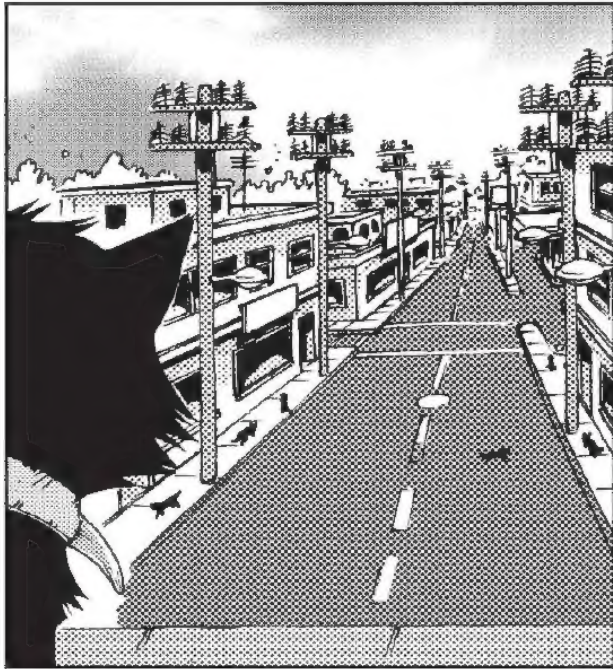
So walk in Scourge's pawsteps—if you dare—and see if you still judge him as harshly by the end. Every cat deserves to have his story told, and this is Scourge's hour.

Best wishes always,
Erin Hunter

WARRIORS

THE RISE OF
SCOURGE







THAT'S US.

MY BROTHER SOCKS...

...MY SISTER RUBY...

...AND ME.

MAMA CALLS ME TINY.

AND THAT'S MAMA.
HER NAME'S QUINCE.

READY
OR NOT...

...HERE I COME!

THMP

MOWFF

FOUND YOU!

HA
HA
HA!

RUBY! SOCKS!
COME HERE AT
ONCE.



YES, MAMA?

YOU SHOULDN'T
PLAY SO ROUGHLY
WITH YOUR BROTHER!
YOU KNOW BETTER
THAN THAT.

I HATE BEING SMALL.

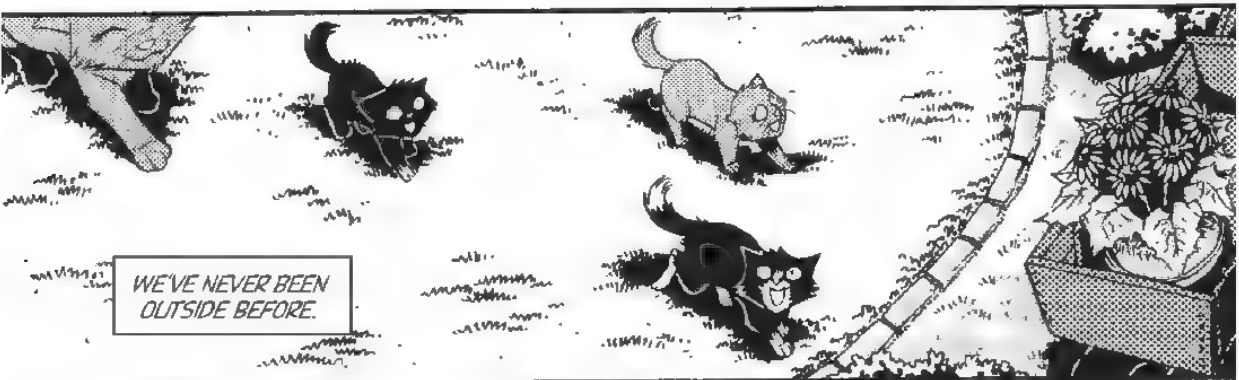
BUT MAMA, HE'S
TOO WEAK, AND HE
MEOWS TOO MUCH. HE
ALWAYS GIVES AWAY
WHERE HE IS!

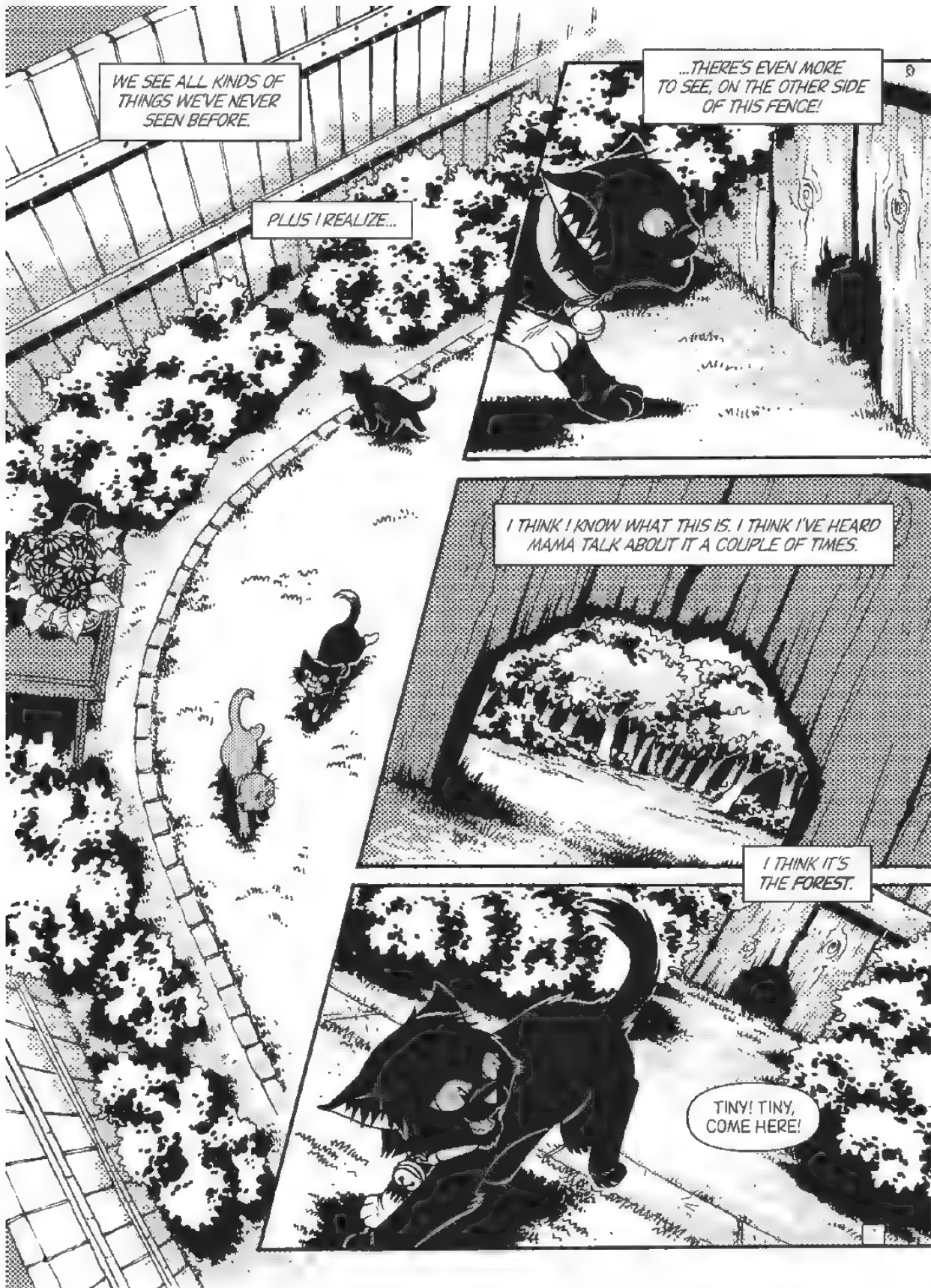
IT'S NO FUN
TO PLAY WITH
HIM.

ALL I WANT IS FOR
MY BROTHER AND SISTER
TO LIKE ME.

HE'S YOUR BROTHER,
RUBY, AND YOU SHOULD TREAT
HIM BETTER. I DON'T WANT TO
SEE ROUGHHOUSING LIKE
THAT AGAIN.

I'D GROW IF
I COULD.





WE SEE ALL KINDS OF
THINGS WE'VE NEVER
SEEN BEFORE.

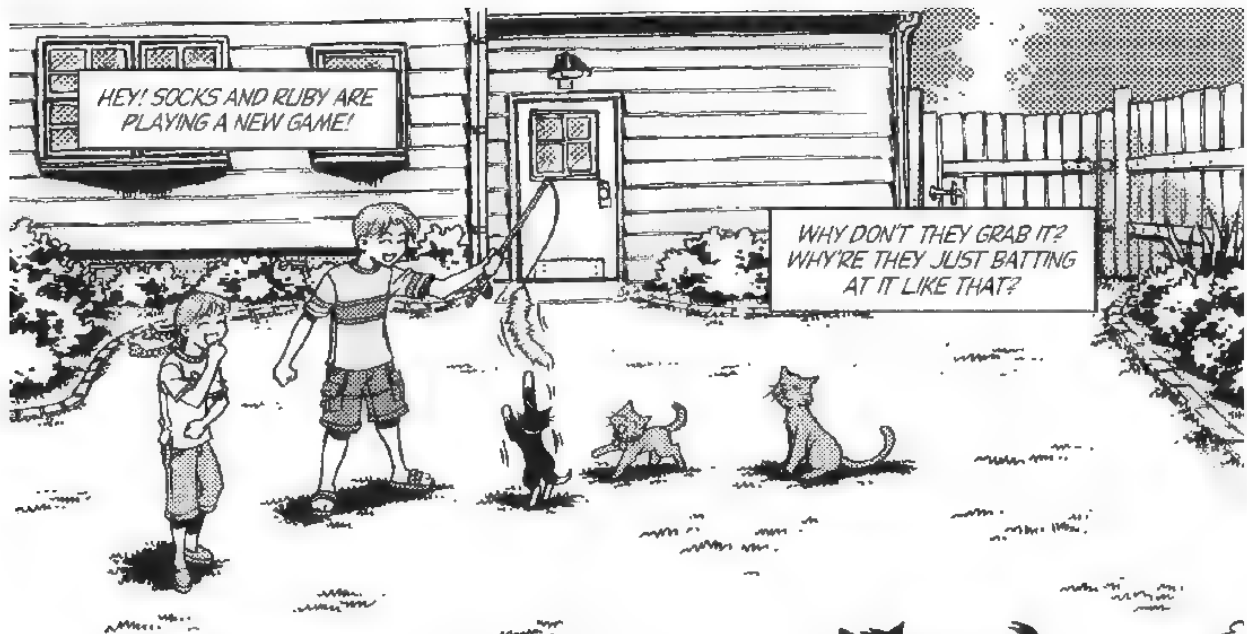
PLUS I REALIZE...

...THERE'S EVEN MORE
TO SEE, ON THE OTHER SIDE
OF THIS FENCE!

I THINK I KNOW WHAT THIS IS. I THINK I'VE HEARD
MAMA TALK ABOUT IT A COUPLE OF TIMES.

I THINK IT'S
THE FOREST.

TINY! TINY,
COME HERE!



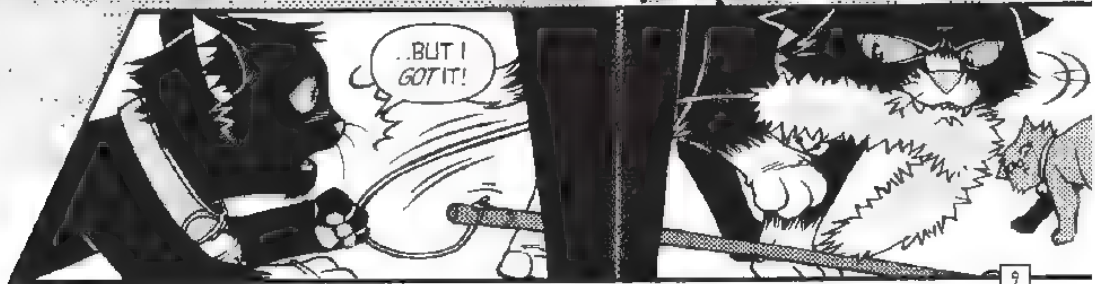
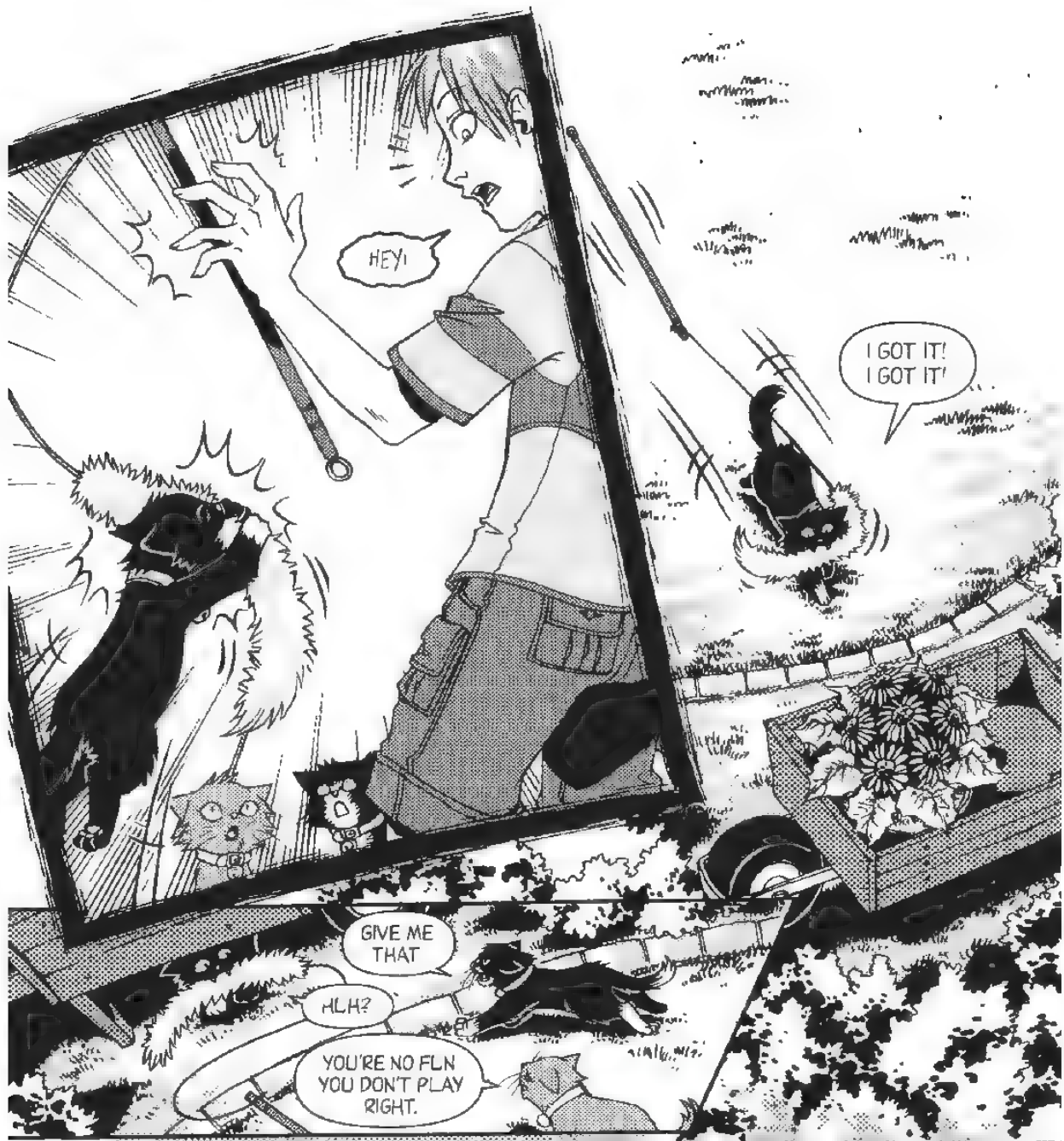
I DON'T THINK THEY'RE DOING IT RIGHT.

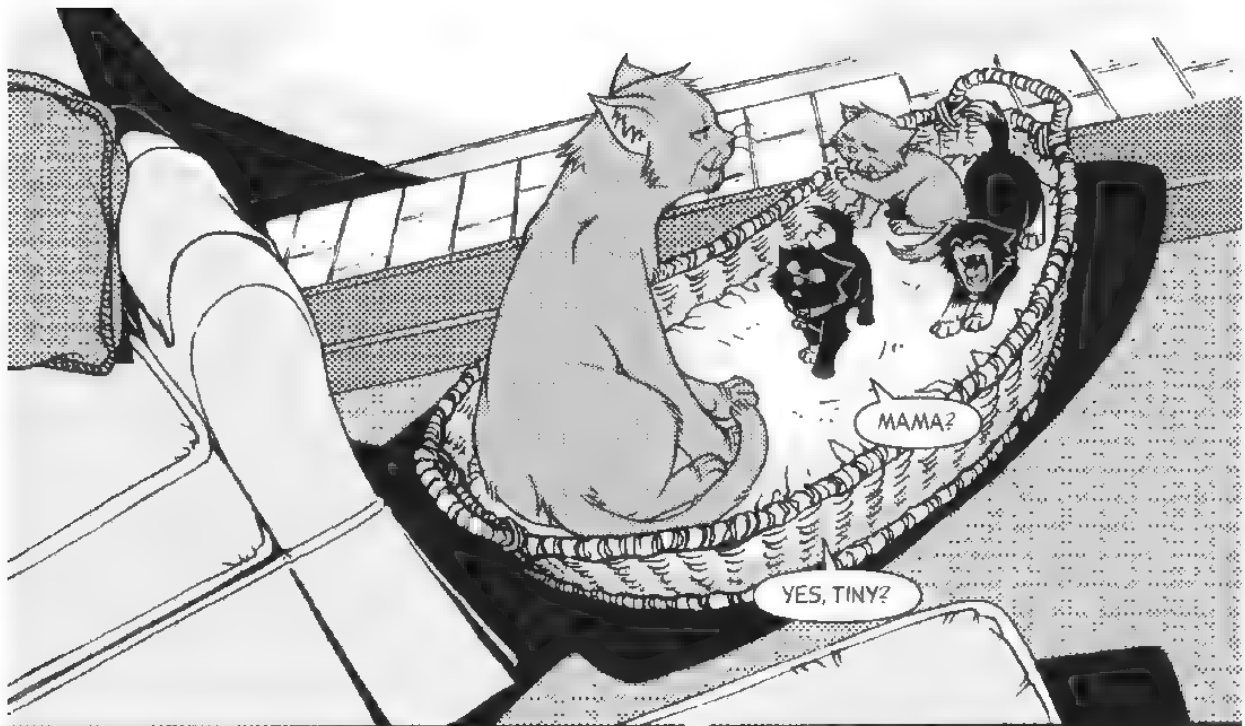


CAN I PLAY?

...I GUESS.

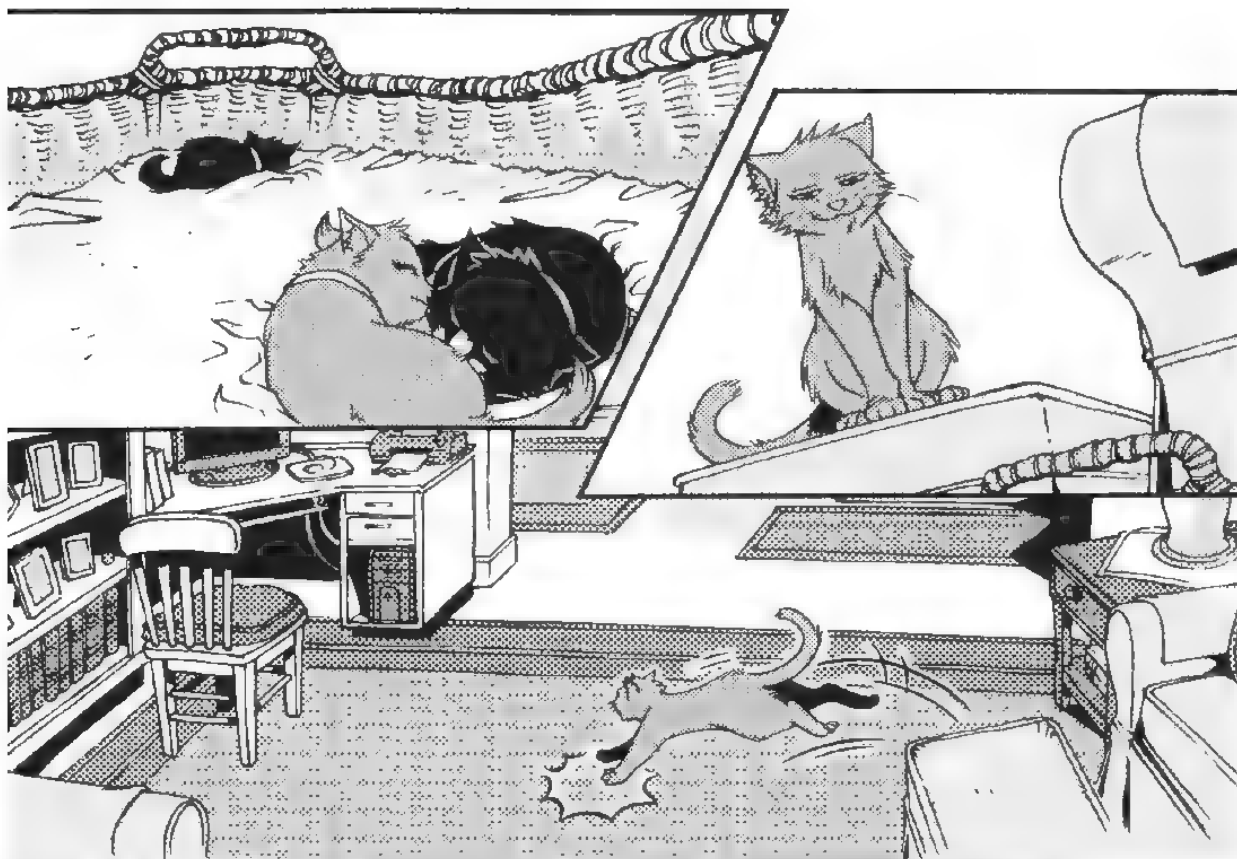












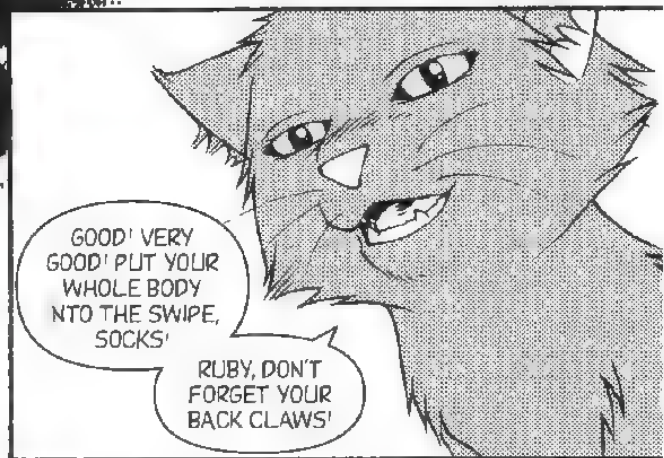


WE GO OUT INTO THE GARDEN
A FEW MORE TIMES...

...BUT SOCKS AND RUBY
DON'T LET ME PLAY WITH
THEM ANYMORE.

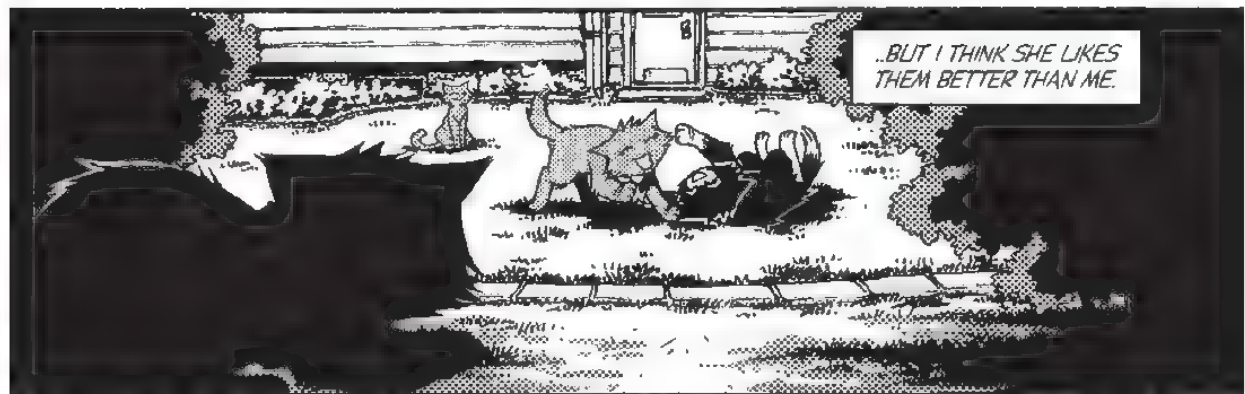


MAMA DOESN'T SAY IT..



GOOD! VERY
GOOD! PUT YOUR
WHOLE BODY
INTO THE SWIPE,
SOCKS!

RUBY, DON'T
FORGET YOUR
BACK CLAWS!

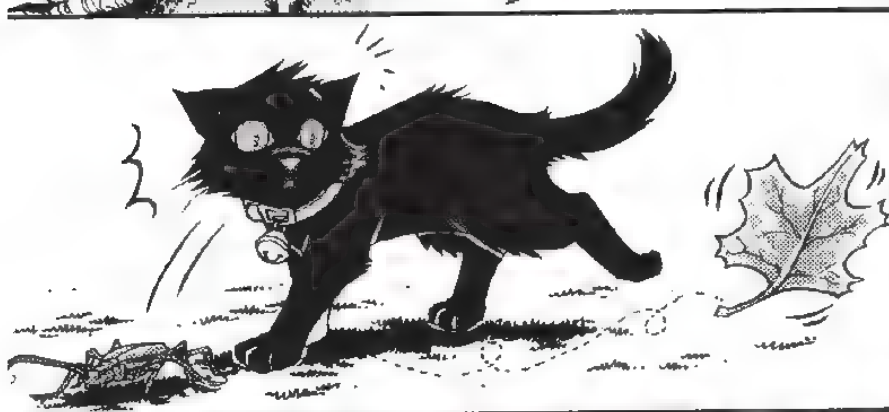


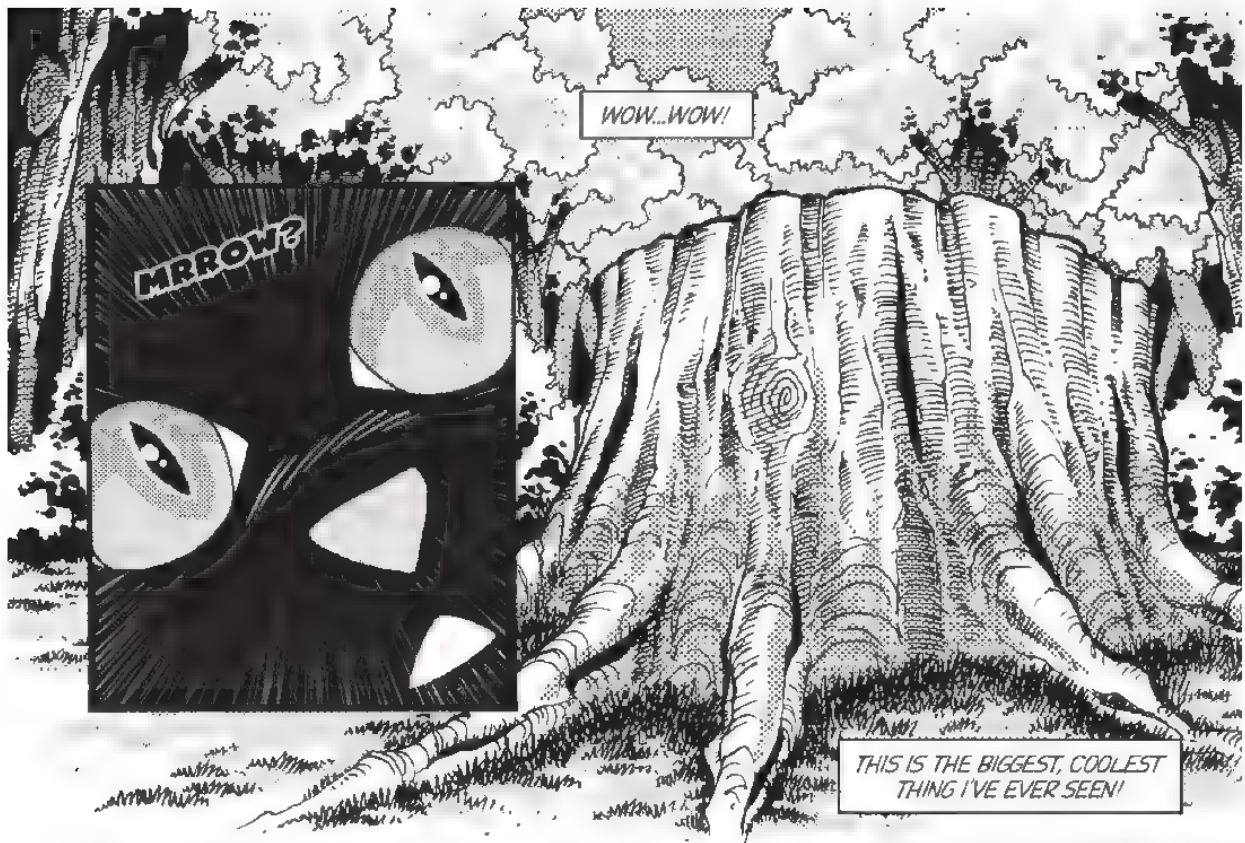
...BUT I THINK SHE LIKES
THEM BETTER THAN ME.













FLAP FLAP FLAP FLAP

CAAW

FLUTTER
FLUTTER

I DID IT! I DIDN'T RUN, OR
CRY, OR ANYTHING! I DID IT!

I'M STRONG!

TINY! TIIINY!
WHERE ARE YOU?

T.IIINY!





AH HA HA HA HA...
CLIMBED A TOWER,
HE SAYS...

AND DON'T FORGET THE GIANT
BIRD! HEE HEE HEE...YOU'RE TOO
LITTLE TO HAVE BIG ADVENTURES
LIKE THAT, TINY!

IT'S TRUE! IT IS! PLUS,
I, I BUILT A HOUSE OUT OF
TWIGS AND LEAVES, AND I
LIVED IN IT!

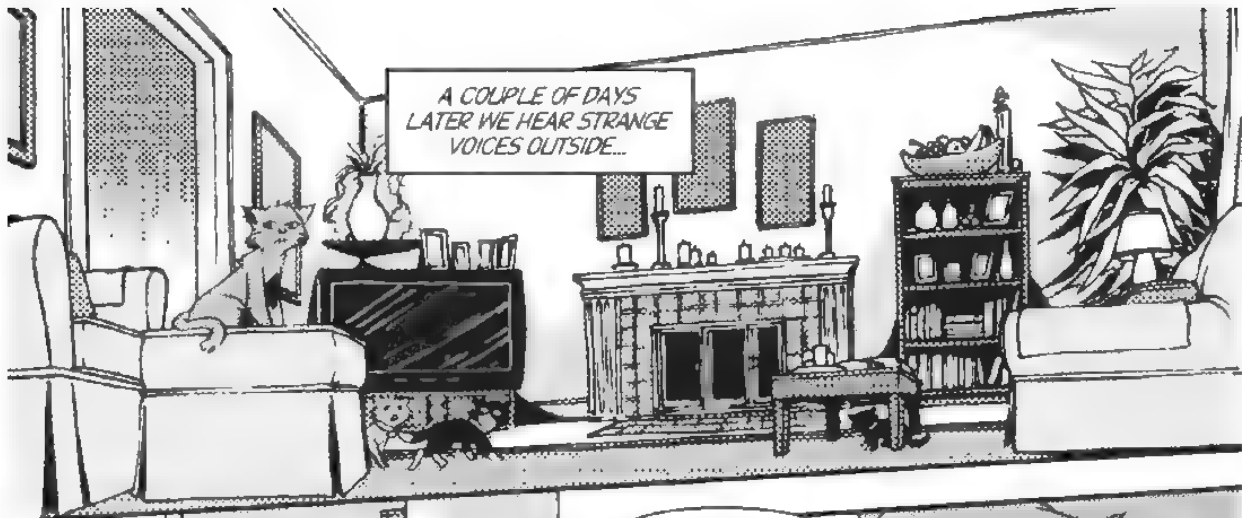
AND THEN I
CAUGHT A FOX,
AND I ATE IT!

WELL, I THINK
YOU'RE A VERY BRAVE
LITTLE CAT

WE KNOW
YOU'RE LYING,
TINY.

YEAH, YOU'RE
JUST A LITTLE
LIAR.



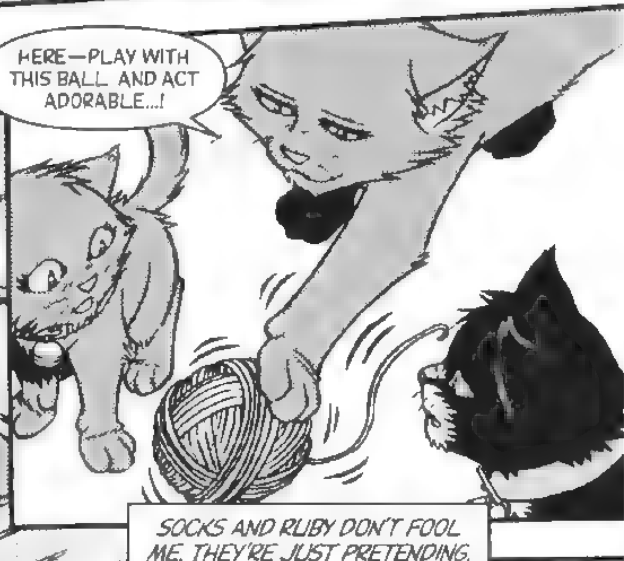


A COUPLE OF DAYS
LATER WE HEAR STRANGE
VOICES OUTSIDE...



AW LOOK
AT THE LITTLE
KITTTIES!

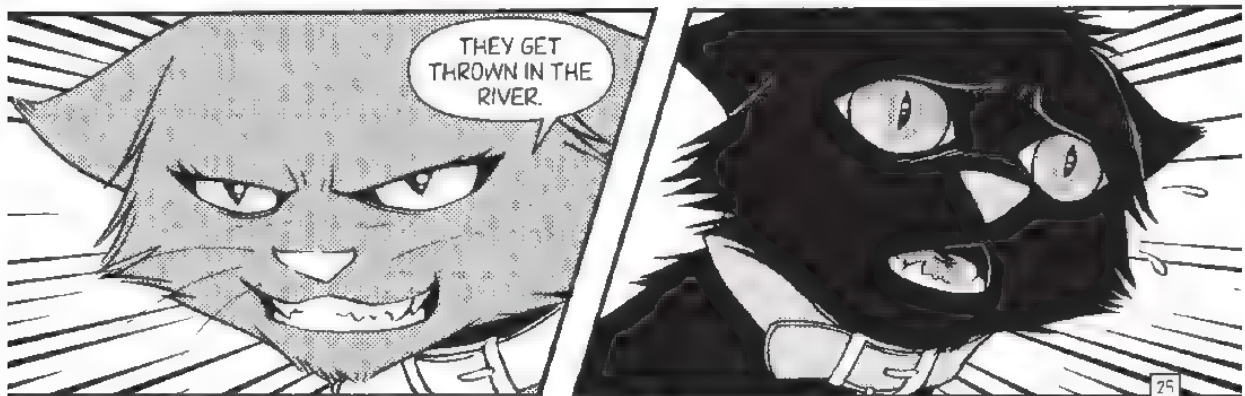
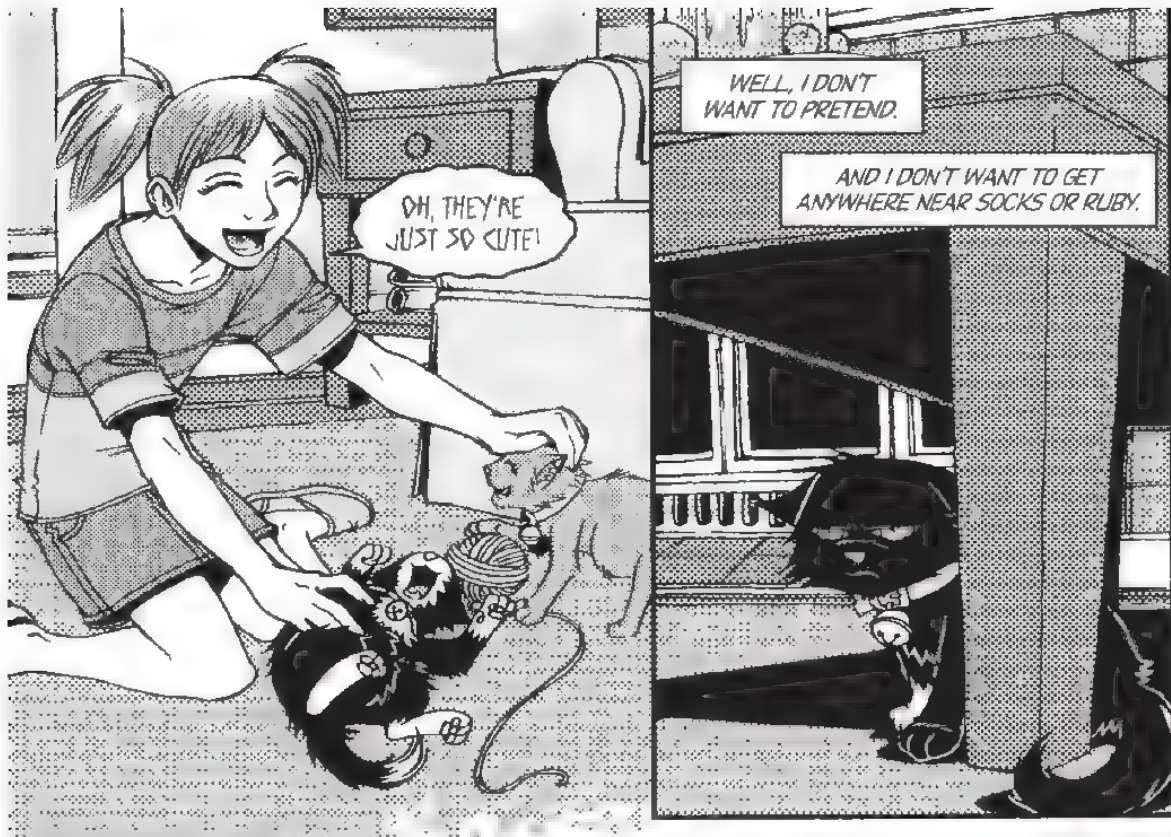
...AND THE NEW HOUSEFOLK MAMA
WAS TALKING ABOUT COME IN.



HERE—PLAY WITH
THIS BALL. AND ACT
ADORABLE...!

SOCKS AND RUBY DON'T FOOL
ME. THEY'RE JUST PRETENDING.

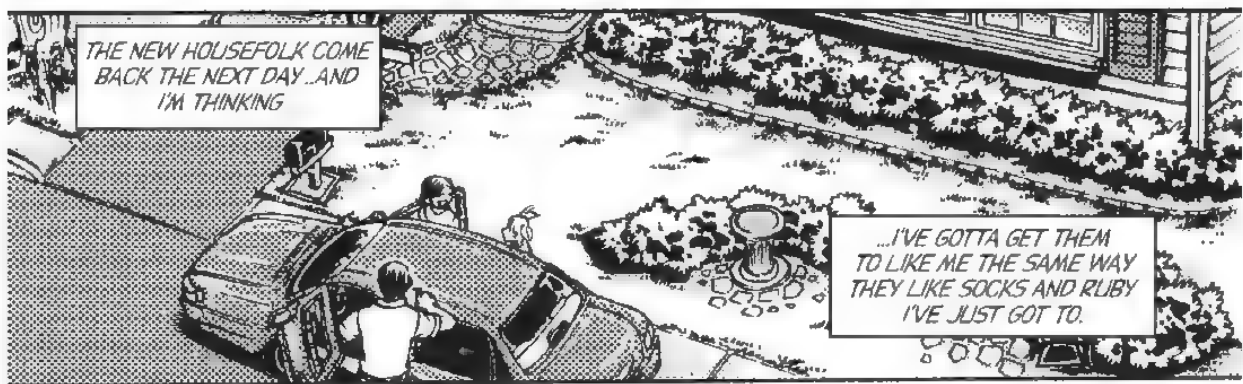






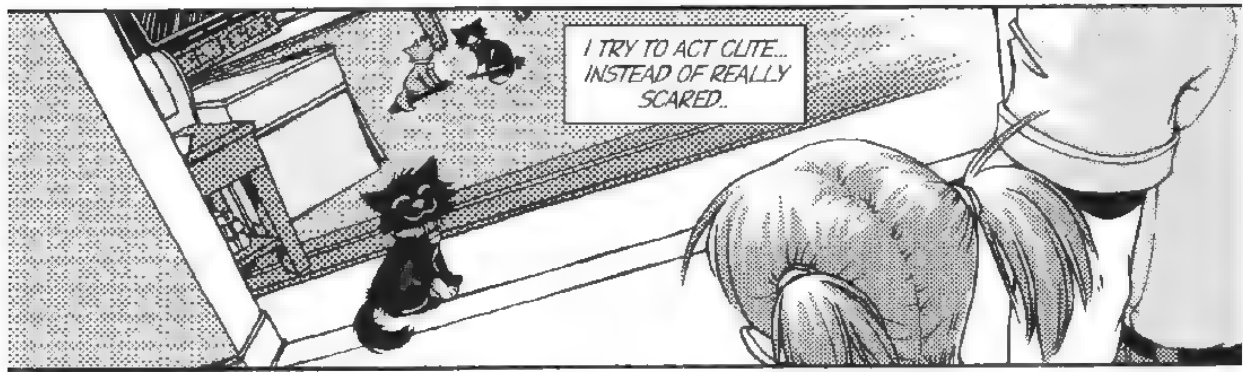
I DON'T WANT TO GET THROWN IN THE RIVER!

I THINK ABOUT WHAT RUBY TOLD ME THE WHOLE REST OF THE DAY AND ALL NIGHT, TOO.



THE NEW HOUSEFOLK COME BACK THE NEXT DAY...AND I'M THINKING

...I'VE GOTTA GET THEM TO LIKE ME THE SAME WAY THEY LIKE SOCKS AND RUBY I'VE JUST GOT TO.



I TRY TO ACT CLITE... INSTEAD OF REALLY SCARED.



...AND THE HOUSEFOLK CLUB GOES RIGHT PAST ME!

SHE DOESN'T WANT ME AT ALL!



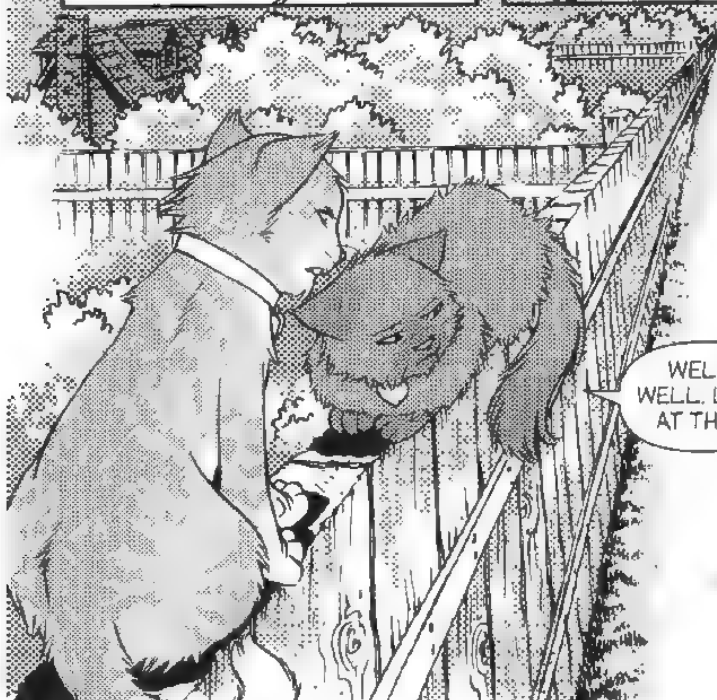
THEY'RE NOT GONNA
THROW ME IN THE RIVER.



I WON'T LET 'EM
I WON'T LET 'EM.



GOTTA GET AWAY...
GET AS FAR AWAY
AS I CAN...



WELL,
WELL. LOOK
AT THAT.



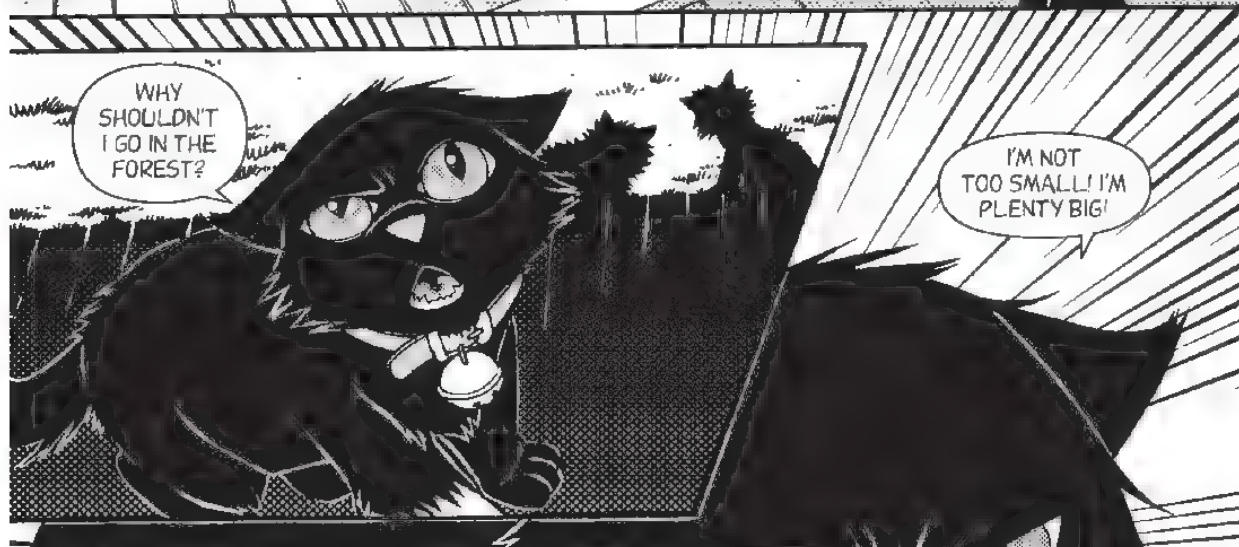
FAR AWAY AS
I—HUH?





RUNNIN' AWAY
FROM HOME, ARE
WE, THEN?

JUST MAKE SURE
YOU DON'T GO IN THE
FOREST, SONNY.



WHY
SHOULDN'T
I GO IN THE
FOREST?

I'M NOT
TOO SMALL! I'M
PLENTY BIG!



YOU'RE MUCH
TOO SMALL TO GO
VENTURING IN
THERE.

WHY. THOSE FOREST
CATS WOULD EAT UP A
CAT AS SMALL AS YOU IN
A SINGLE GULP.

AND
I'M STRONG,
TOO!



RIGHT THEN I CATCH A SCENT...
SOMETHING WARM...SOMETHING
SCRUMPTIOUS. IT'S RIGHT OUT
THERE IN THE WOODS.

I'M NOT AFRAID OF THE
FOREST, OR ANYTHING IN IT



THEY CAN SAY WHAT
THEY WANT TO

I'M GOING
EXPLORING.

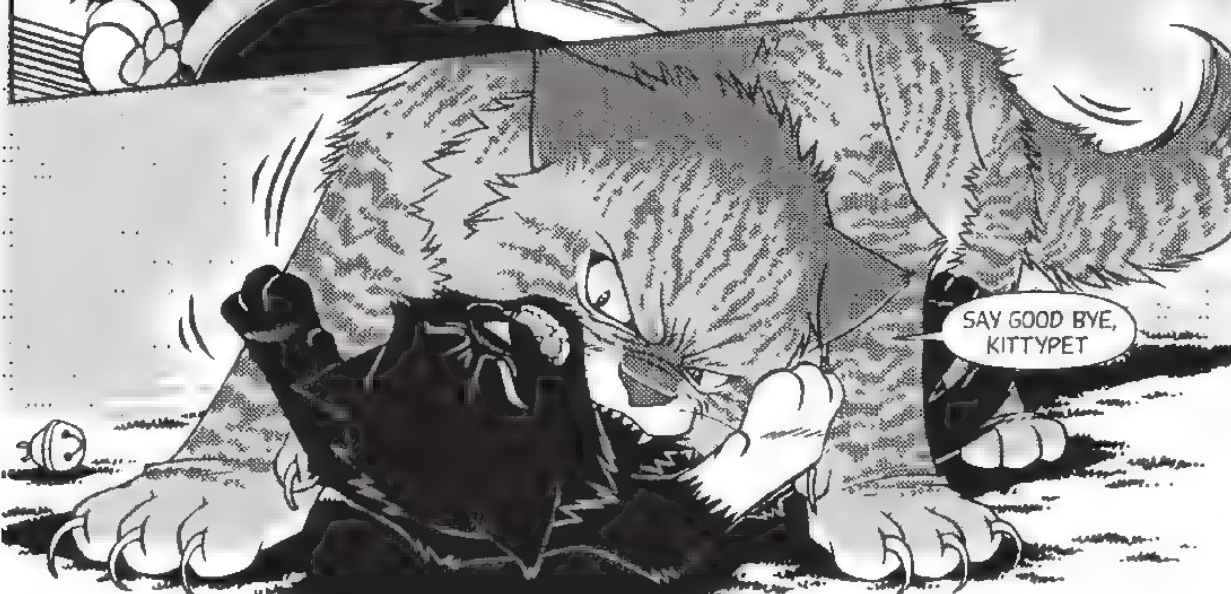
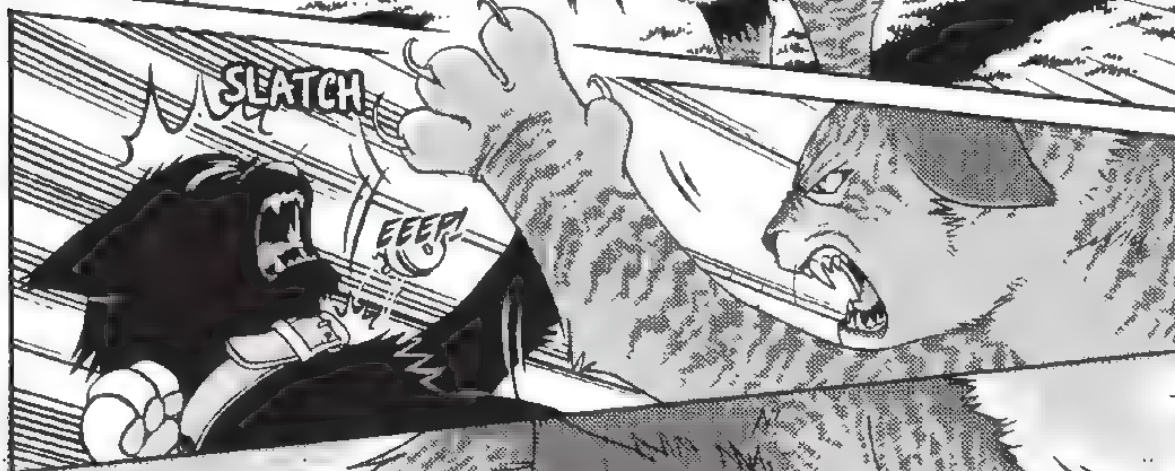


THIS IS SO GREAT! I'M IN THE FOREST,
AND IT SMELLS WONDERFUL, AND
THE LEAVES FEEL SO GOOD ON MY
PAWS, AND I—

sniff!
sniff!









WARRIORS DO NOT
NEED TO KILL CATS
TO WIN A BATTLE,
REMEMBER?

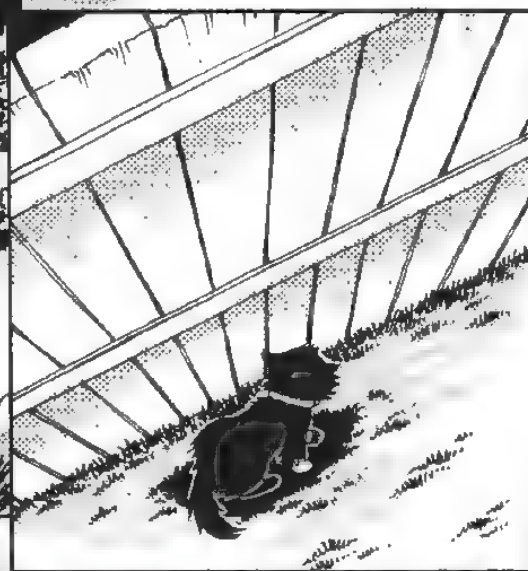
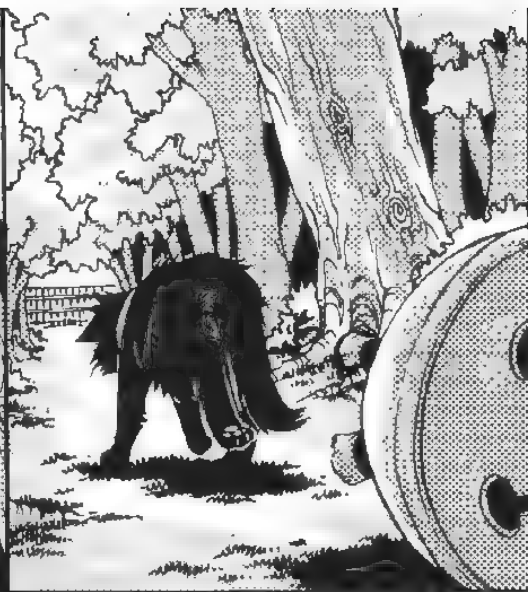
STOP, TIGERPAW!
THAT'S ENOUGH!

I WAS JUST
DEFENDING OUR
TERRITORY.

AND YOU'VE
DONE THAT. THIS KIT
HAS LEARNED HIS
LESSON.

YEAH.

YOU'LL NEVER
FORGET ME.





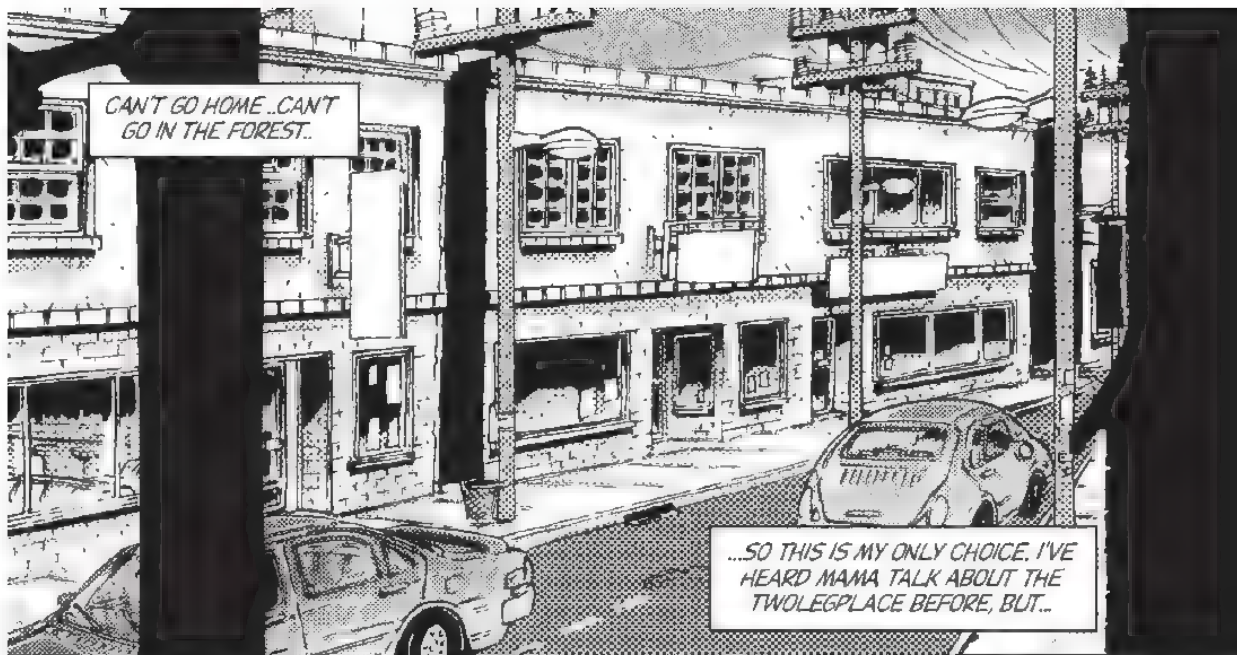
I HURT EVERYWHERE.

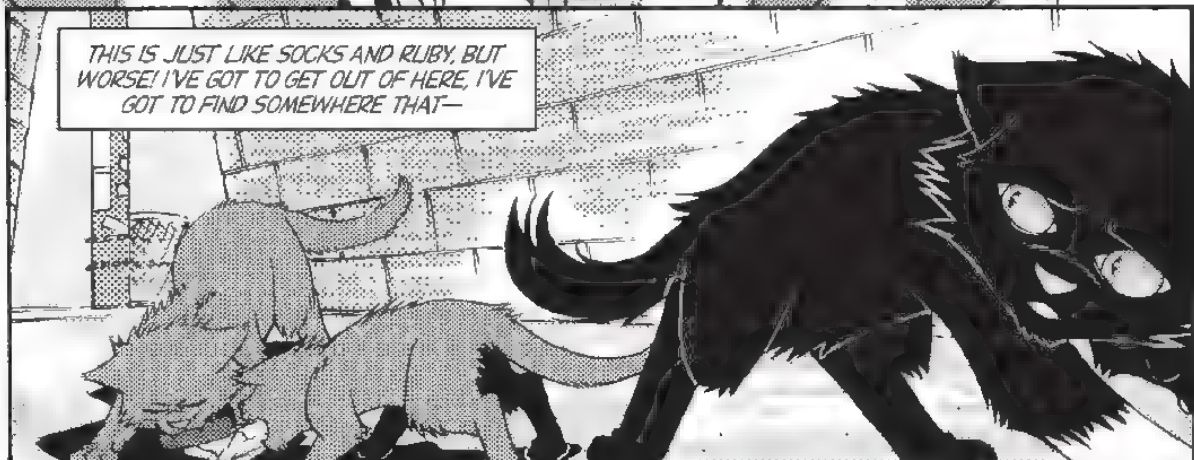
I'VE GOT TO GET HOME.

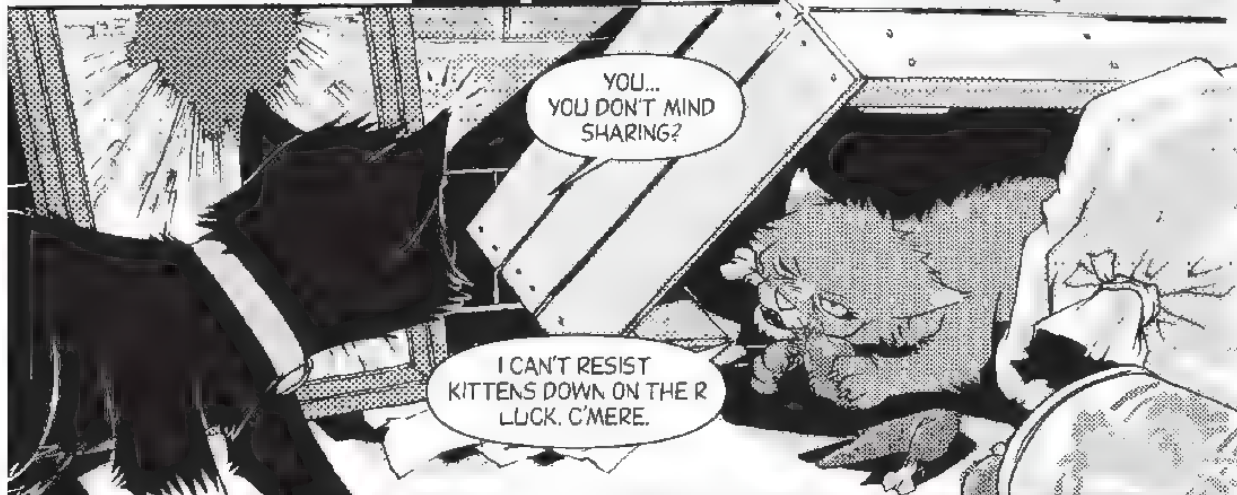
BUT WHEN I GET THERE,
I REMEMBER. I DON'T HAVE A HOME.
SOCKS AND RUBY ARE GONE NOW...

... AND IF I GO BACK, THEY'LL
THROW ME IN THE RIVER.

GOOD-BYE, MAMA.









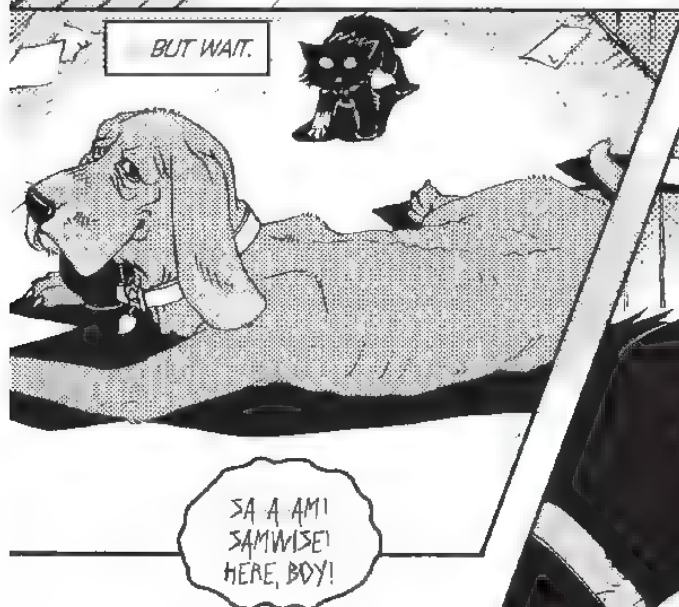


STUPID COLLAR. STUPID CATS.
I'LL FIND A WAY TO GET THIS
THING OFF, AND WHEN I DO, I'LL—



MRRRAHRR!

IT'S A DOG! DOGS CHASE
CATS, AND, AND EAT THEM
SOMETIMES, AND I THINK I
MIGHT PASS OUT—



BUT WAIT.

SA A AMI
SAMWISE!
HERE, BOY!



THIS DOG IS OLD.

WHUFF

SO OLD HE CAN BARELY MOVE.
HE'S NOT GONNA EAT ME.



THAT'S WHEN I SEE HIS TOOTH.

IF HIS TEETH KEEP FALLING
OUT, HE WON'T BE EATING
ANYTHING.



BUT MAYBE I
CAN USE IT...



...TO GET THIS
THING...OFF ME...



LIGH!

...STUPID
COLLAR.



YOU'LL NEVER FORGET ME...

...WILL YOU?
MEEP?

NO.

I'LL NEVER
FORGET.





HUH?
OH, THE
TOOTH...!

I RIPPED IT RIGHT
OUT OF A DOG'S HEAD!



THE DOG WAS GOING
AFTER SOME FOOD I HAD
STASHED AWAY...



...SO I HAD TO PLIT
IT IN ITS PLACE.



IT WAS PRETTY FIERCE,
BUT IT COULDN'T STAND
UP TO ME.

ONCE IT WAS DEAD, I
PRIED OPEN ITS MOUTH
AND TOOK THIS TROPHY.



IS THAT
A FACT?



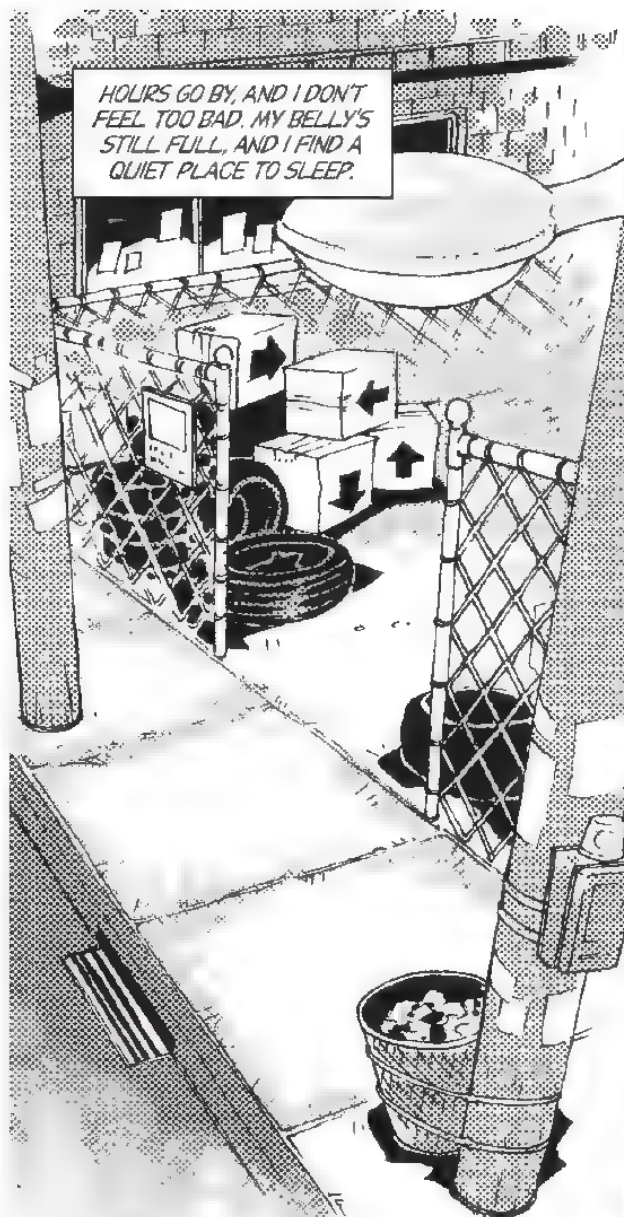
YOU? YOU
KILLED A DOG
AND TOOK ITS
TOOTH?



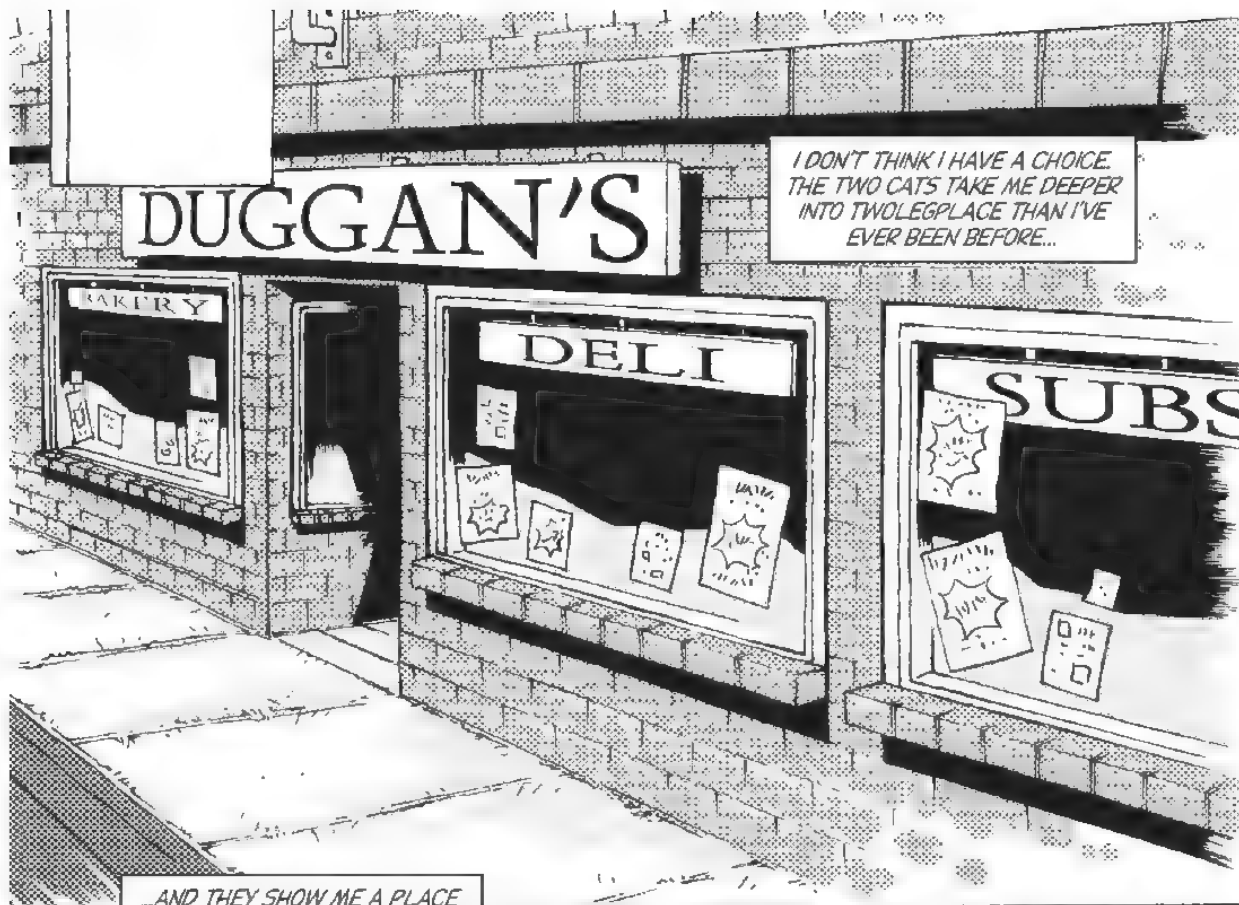
I DON'T THINK THEY
BELIEVE ME, NOT
ALL THE WAY



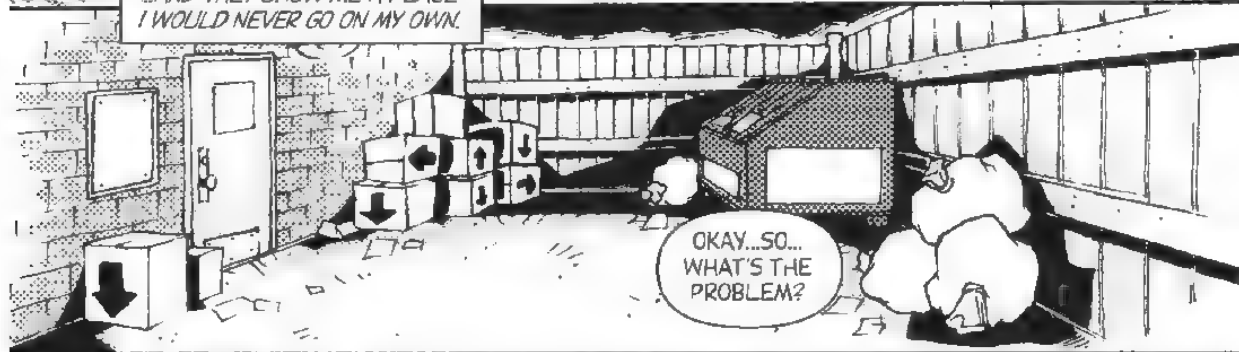
BUT RIGHT NOW,
I DON'T CARE







I DON'T THINK I HAVE A CHOICE.
THE TWO CATS TAKE ME DEEPER
INTO TWOLEGPLACE THAN I'VE
EVER BEEN BEFORE...



...AND THEY SHOW ME A PLACE
I WOULD NEVER GO ON MY OWN.

OKAY...SO...
WHAT'S THE
PROBLEM?



IT WON'T LET ANY
OF US NEAR THE FOOD.
WE'VE TRIED TO CHASE IT
AWAY, BUT IT'S TOO B.G.
TOO STRONG.

A BIG DOG
HAS MADE ITS DEN
BACK HERE.



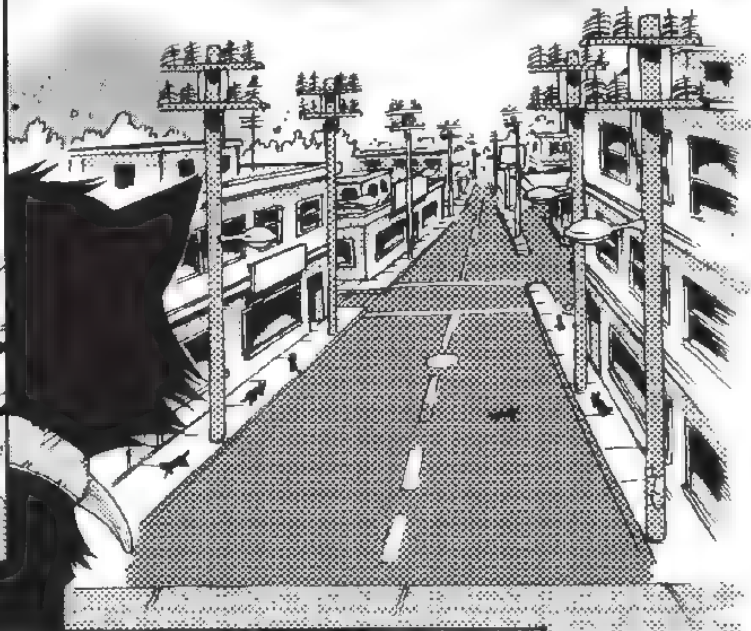
I FIGURE I CAN GET A
BETTER IDEA OF THINGS
IF I CAN SEE MORE.

IT'S NOT TOO HARD TO
CLIMB UP TO THE TOP OF
THE BIG TWOLEG DEN.

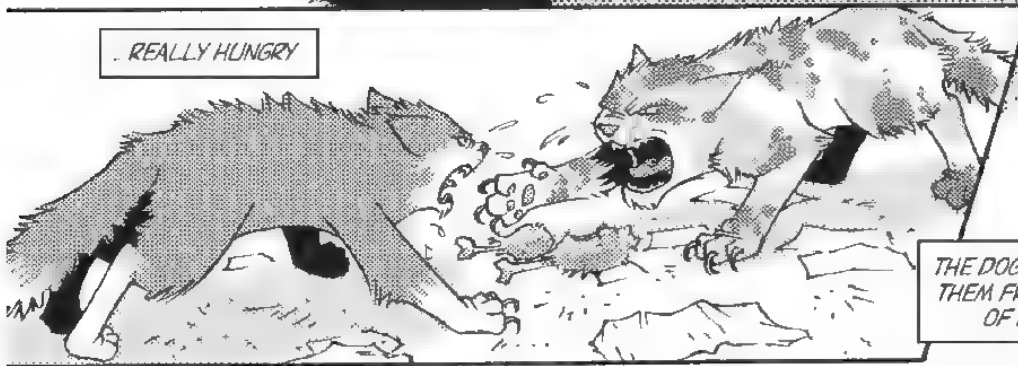


WOW...THERE'RE A LOT MORE CATS
AROUND HERE THAN I THOUGHT!

AND THEY'RE ALL...

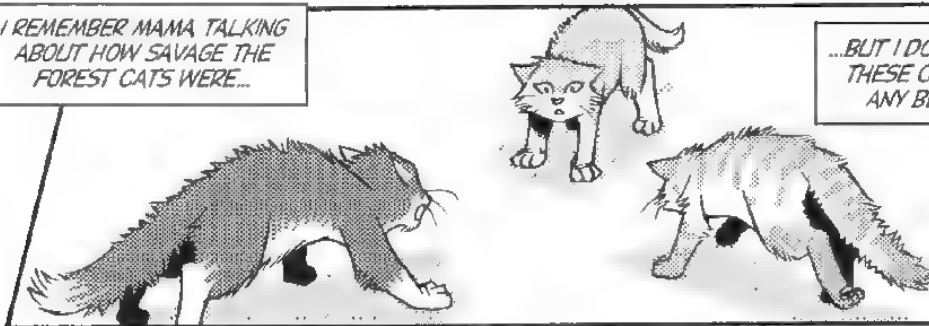


...REALLY HUNGRY

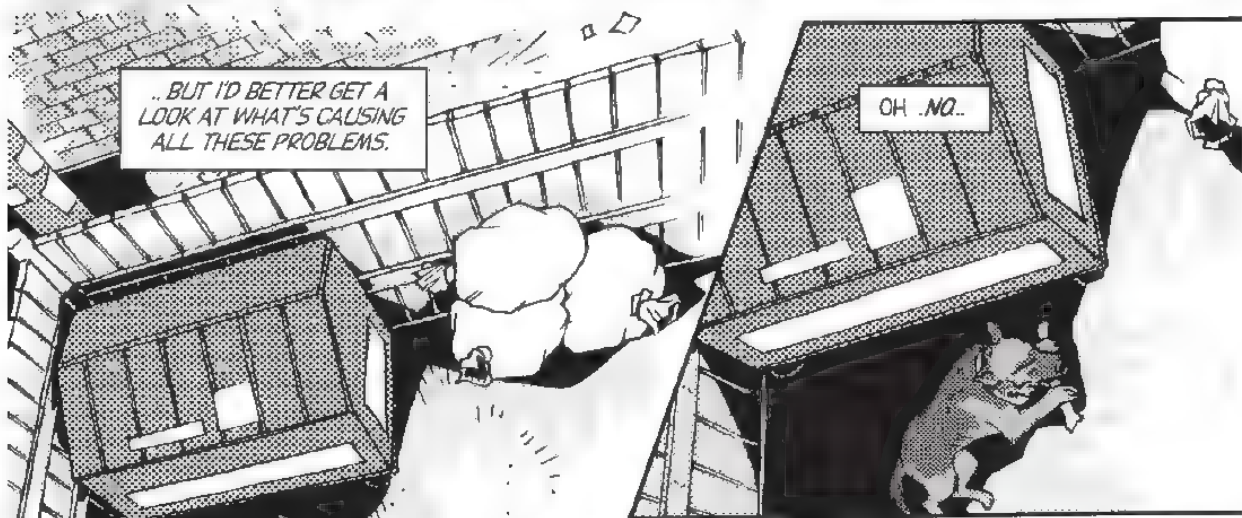


THE DOG'S KEEPING
THEM FROM A LOT
OF FOOD.

I REMEMBER MAMA TALKING
ABOUT HOW SAVAGE THE
FOREST CATS WERE...



...BUT I DON'T THINK
THESE CATS ARE
ANY BETTER.



I DON'T WANT TO FIGHT THIS
DOG! I CAN'T! I'M JUST A KIT!



PLIS I'M
SCARED TO
DEATH

BUT ALL THOSE CATS DOWN
THERE ARE AFRAID, TOO. WE'RE
ALL AFRAID TOGETHER



I THINK ABOUT RUNNING AWAY
AGAIN. BUT WHERE?



LIKE IT OR NOT...
I THINK THIS PLACE IS
MY HOME NOW.

I HAVE TO FIGHT.



EVEN IF IT KILLS ME.





HOLD ON. IT'S—THE
DOG ISN'T LOOKING
AT ME. WHY ISN'T IT
LOOKING AT ME?

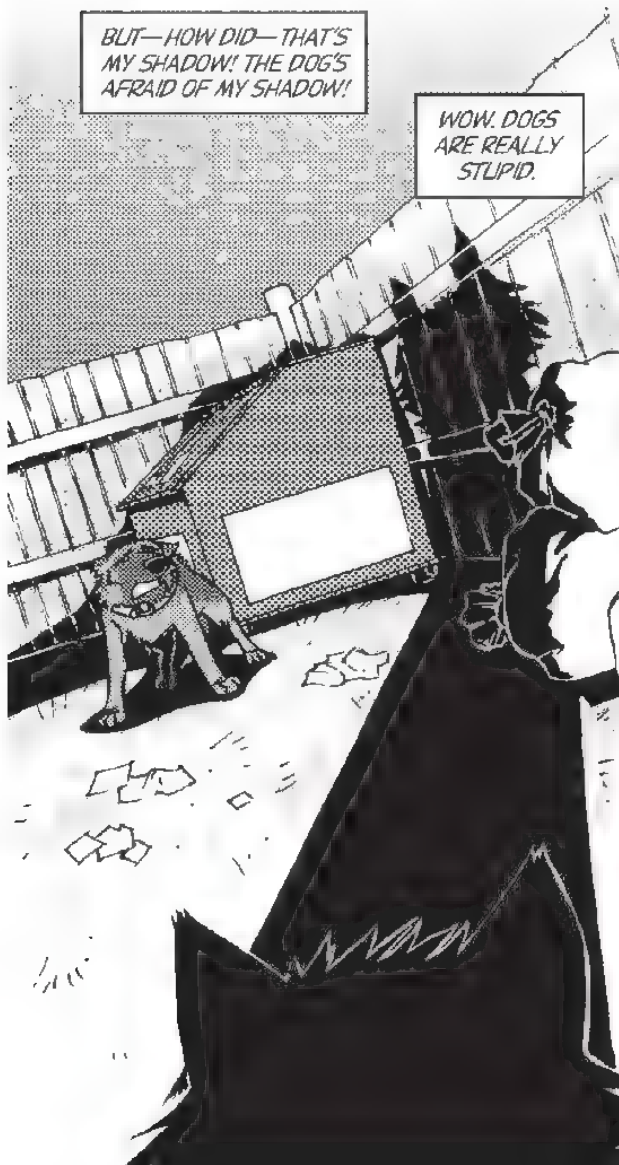


WHAT'S IT
GROWLING AT?



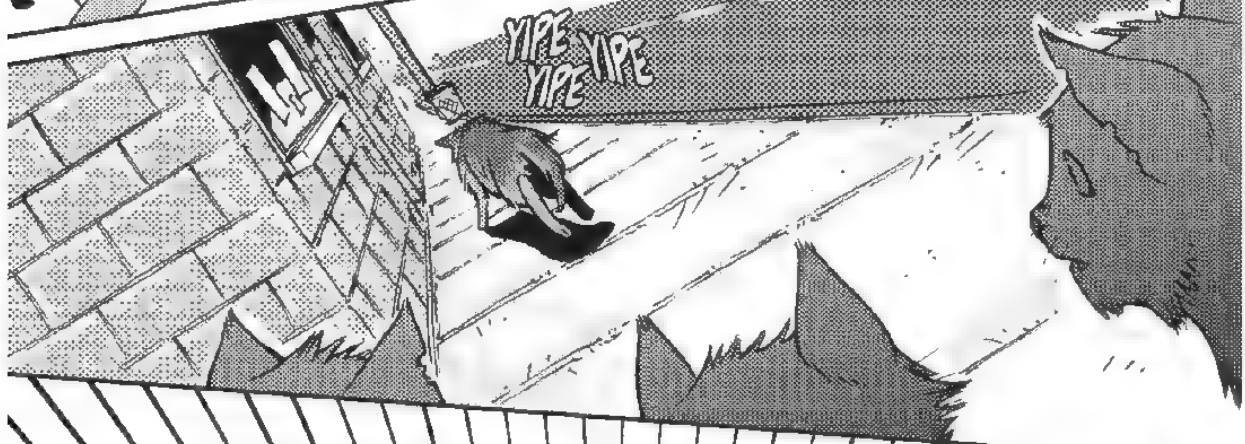
BUT—HOW DID—THAT'S
MY SHADOW! THE DOG'S
AFRAID OF MY SHADOW!

WOW. DOGS
ARE REALLY
STUPID.



MAYBE I CAN GRAB A
DIFFERENT KIND OF TROPHY...







BUT I'M NOT ABOUT
TO LET ANY OF THESE
CATS KNOW THAT.

THAT WAS
AMAZING!

HOW'D YOL
DO THAT

NEVER
WOULD'VE
BELIEVED ..!

OUR
HERO!

THANK YOL,
THANK YOU SO MUCH,
YOU'VE SAVED US,
YOU'VE SAVED OUR
LIVES!

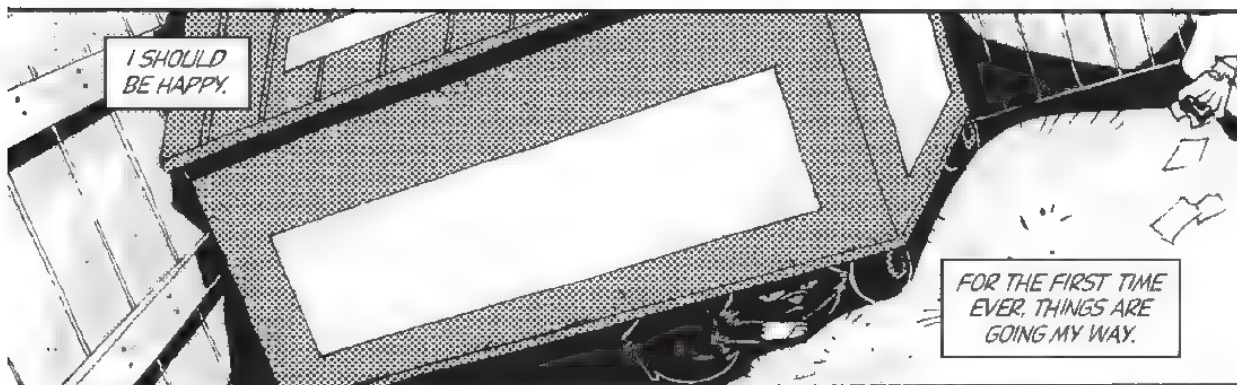
WHAT'S YOUR
NAME?

I TRY NOT TO LET IT SHOW,
BUT IT REALLY HITS ME.
NOBODY HERE HAS EVER
ASKED WHAT MY NAME IS.

AND YOU KNOW WHAT? IT
ISN'T "TINY." NOT ANYMORE.

THOSE SAVAGES
ARE A SCOURGE
ON THE NAME OF
ALL GOOD CATS.







I AWAKE AT DAYBREAK
THE FOLLOWING MORNING,
READY TO GO OUT SEARCHING
FOR FOOD AGAIN...

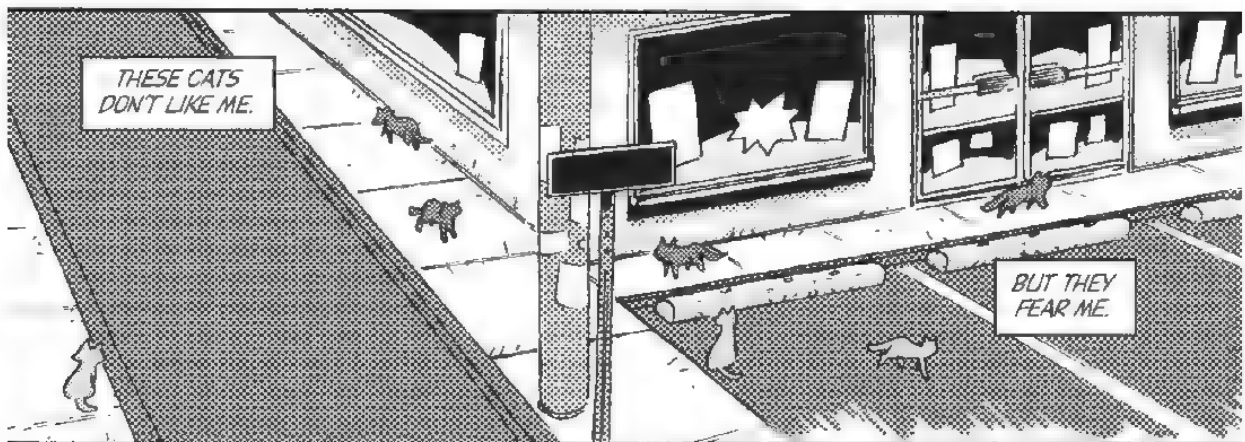


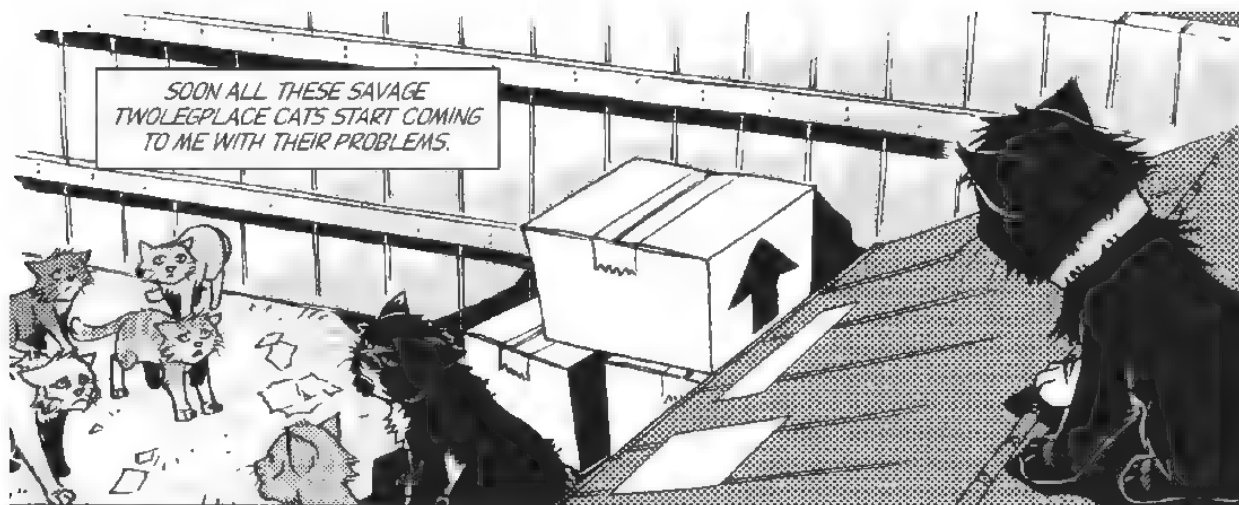
...ONLY TO FIND THAT THE CATS
I HELPED THE NIGHT BEFORE
HAVE DECIDED TO HELP ME.

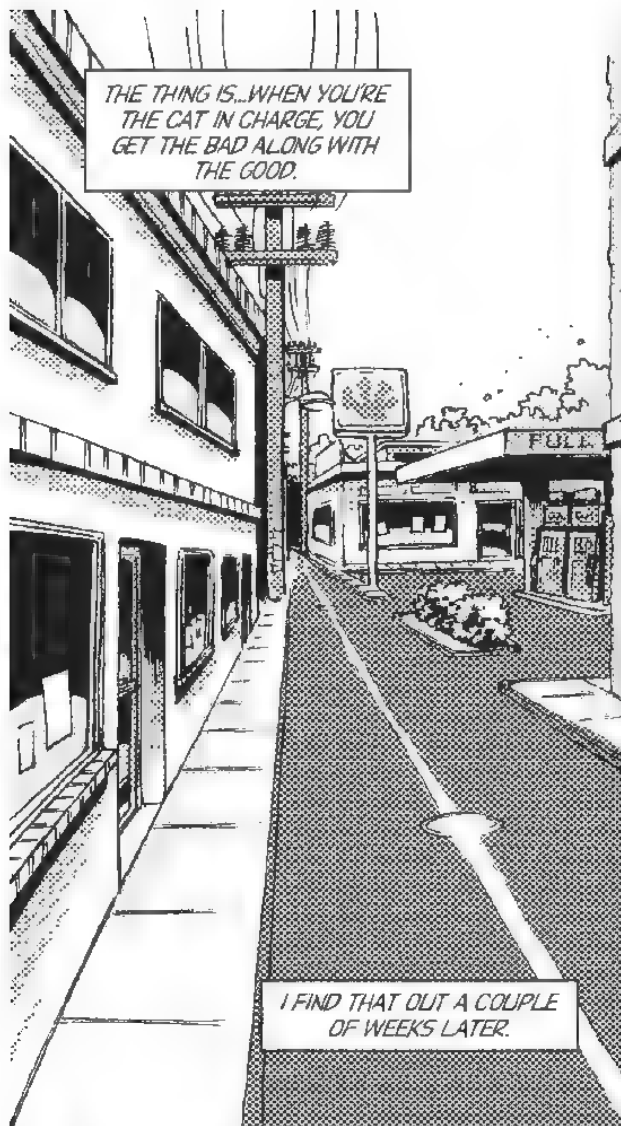
I EAT EVERY BIT OF
THE CHICKEN AND
SAVOR EACH BITE.



I SEE THEM WATCHING ME.
THEY TRY TO BE SUBTLE,
BUT I SEE THEM.







THE THING IS...WHEN YOU'RE
THE CAT IN CHARGE, YOU
GET THE BAD ALONG WITH
THE GOOD.

I FIND THAT OUT A COUPLE
OF WEEKS LATER.



SCOURGE?
SCOURGE, ARE
YOU AWAKE?

MRRRHH..
YES—I'LL BE OUT
IN A MOMENT

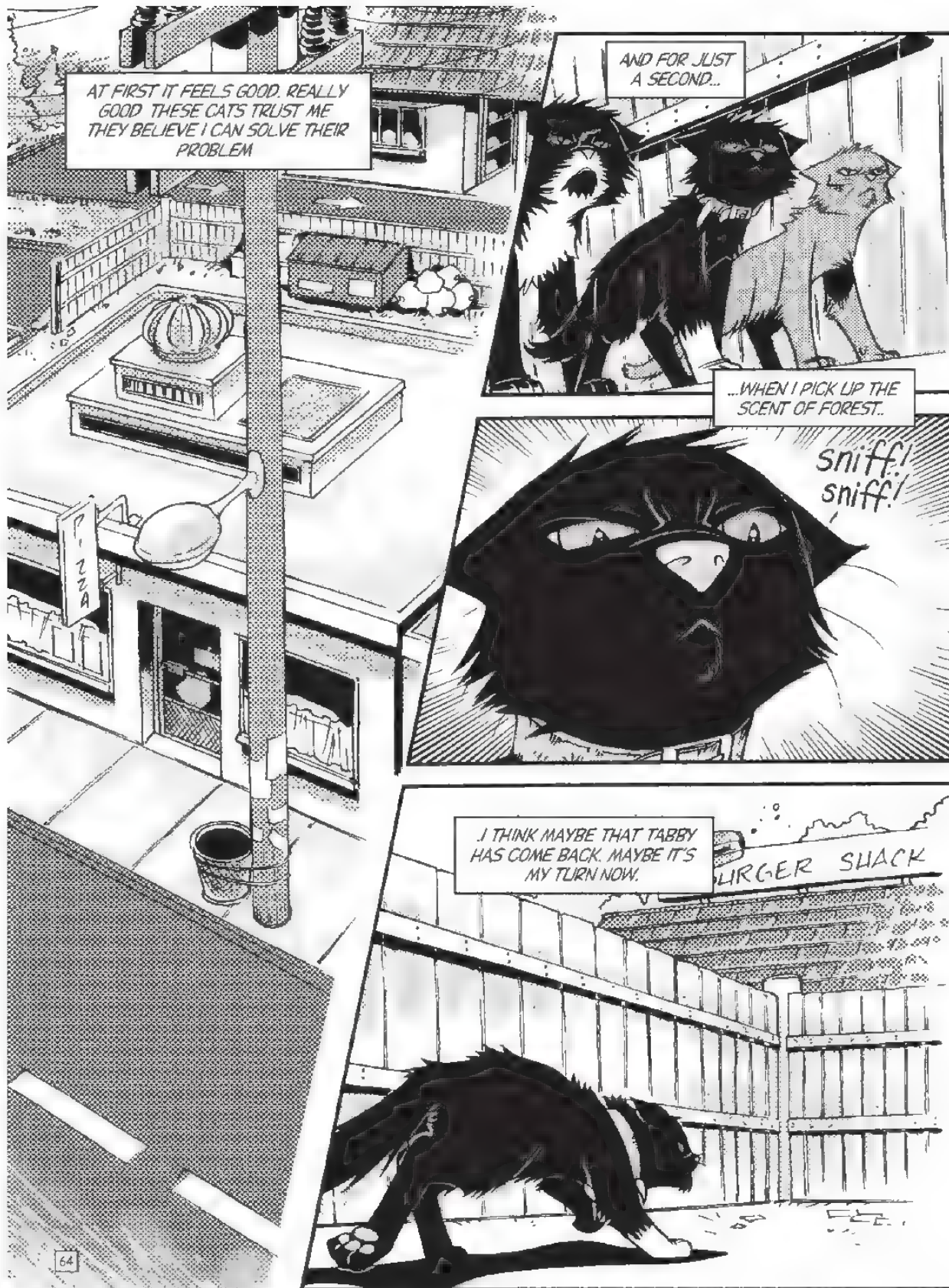


WHAT'S
WRONG?

IT'S—THERE
ARE SOME ROGUE CATS.
BEHIND A TWOLEG FOOD
PLACE, AND...

...THEY'RE CAUS'NG A
LOT OF TROUBLE. WE'RE
AFRAID THEY'RE GO'NG
TO HURT OR EVEN KILL
SOMEONE

WILL YOL
HELP US?



AT FIRST IT FEELS GOOD. REALLY GOOD. THESE CATS TRUST ME. THEY BELIEVE I CAN SOLVE THEIR PROBLEM.

AND FOR JUST A SECOND...

...WHEN I PICK UP THE SCENT OF FOREST...

sniff!
sniff!

I THINK MAYBE THAT TABBY HAS COME BACK. MAYBE IT'S MY TURN NOW.

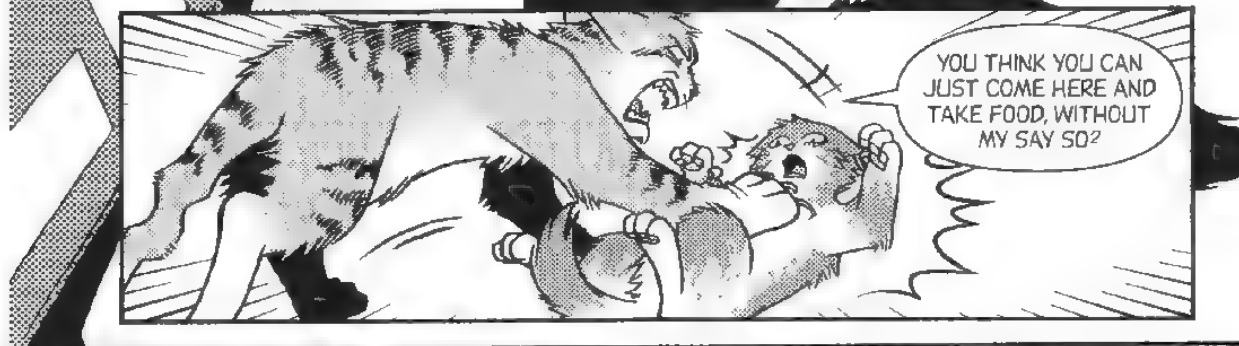
PIZZA
BURGER SHACK



BUT NO.

I'VE NEVER SEEN
THIS CAT BEFORE.

WHICH MAKES HIM NO
LESS AN INTRUDER, OF
COURSE.



YOU THINK YOU CAN
JUST COME HERE AND
TAKE FOOD, WITHOUT
MY SAY SO?



GET OVER THERE
AND BRING ME SOME-
THING TO EAT!

MAYBE
THEN I'LL DECIDE
WHAT TO DO WITH
YOU.



LEAVE HER
ALONE AND GET OUT
OF HERE.

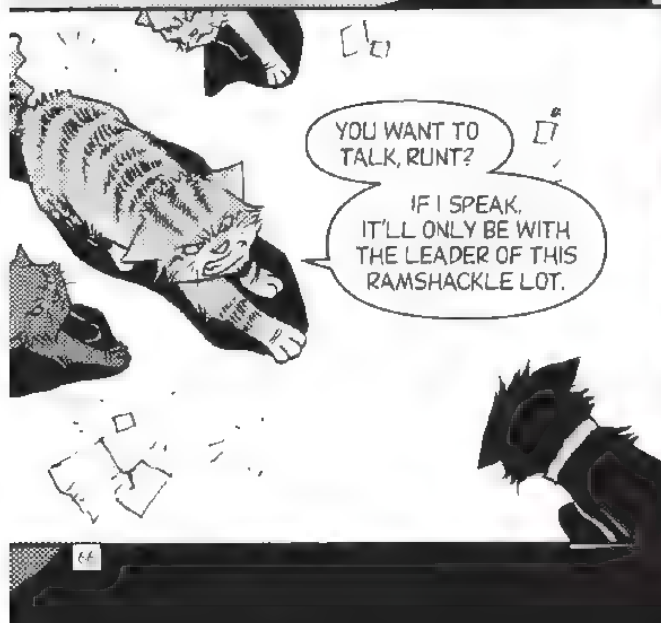


TROUBLE
BOSS?

WANT US
TO TAKE CARE
OF IT?

NO, NO
TROUBLE WOULD
BE BIGGER.

WE'RE
LOOKING AT A
NUISANCE.

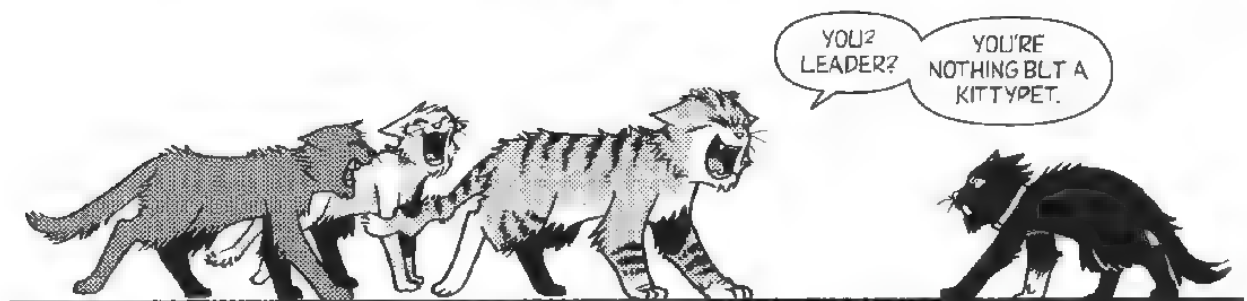


YOU WANT TO
TALK, RUNT?

IF I SPEAK,
IT'LL ONLY BE WITH
THE LEADER OF THIS
RAMSHACKLE LOT.

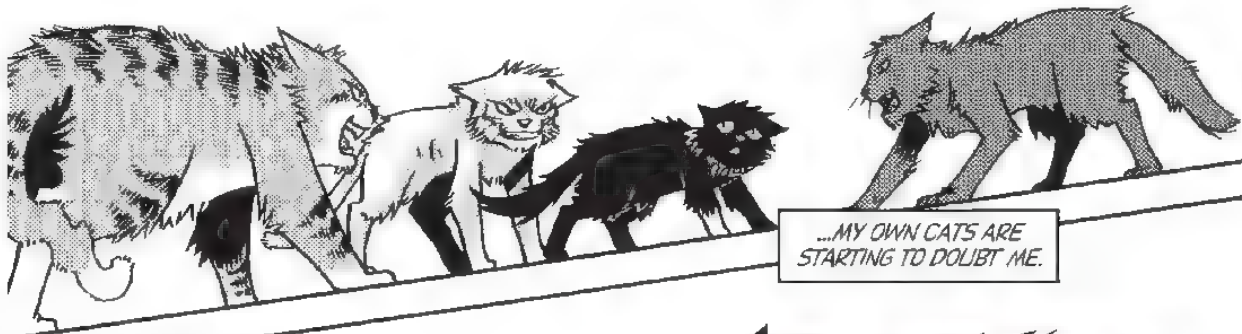


THEN SPEAK
TO ME.



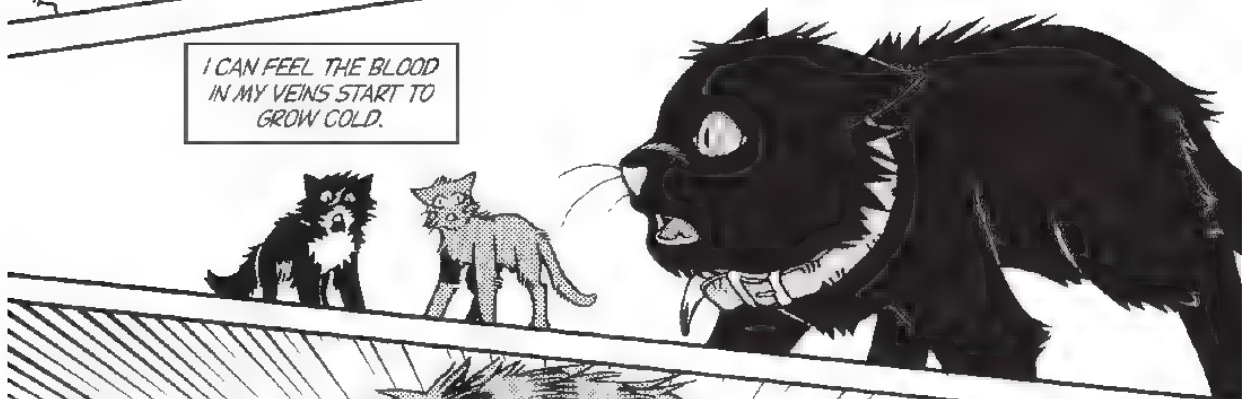
THEY'RE LAUGHING
AT ME. LAUGHING.

AND AS THEY DO
IT, I CAN TELL...



...MY OWN CATS ARE
STARTING TO DOLIBT ME.

I CAN FEEL THE BLOOD
IN MY VEINS START TO
GROW COLD.



I'M NOT SMALL. I'M NOT
WEAK. I'M SCOURGE, AND THIS
PLACE BELONGS TO ME.



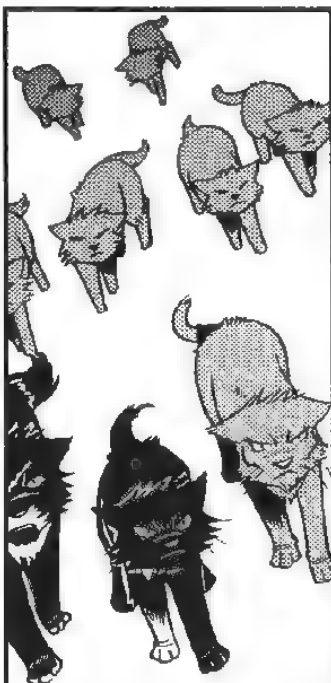
AND IF THEY WON'T
GIVE ME THE PROPER
RESPECT...

THEN I'LL TAKE
IT BY FORCE.



MY CATS NEED
TO BE SHOWN.

ONCE THEY
UNDERSTAND WHAT
CAN BE DONE...THEY'LL
TRUST IN ME TO SHOW
THEM HOW TO DO IT.



I CAN FEEL THEM.
BEHIND ME. MOVING IN.
CLOSING RANKS.

I'VE HAD MY
FILL OF THIS
PLACE.
IT IS TIME WE
RETURNED TO THE
FOREST...WHERE WE
BELONG.



NOW ALL THEY
NEED IS A GESTURE.





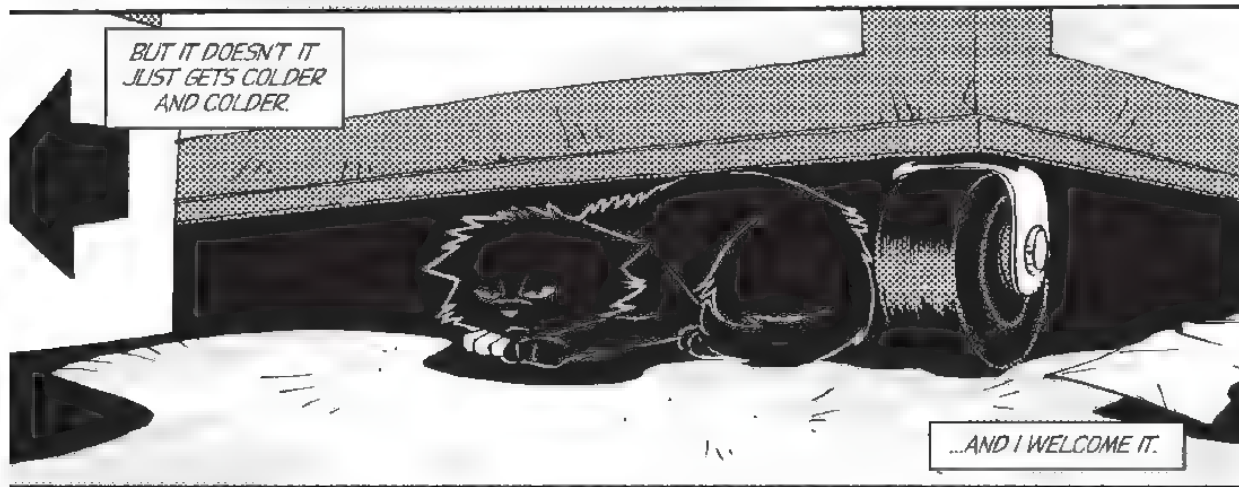
I HAD TO HAVE ICE
IN MY VEINS TO DO
WHAT I JUST DID.



I EXPECT THE
ICE TO MELT...



FROM NOW ON, NO
ONE TAKES FOOD FROM
THIS PLACE WITHOUT
MY PERMISSION.



BUT IT DOESN'T IT
JUST GETS COLDER
AND COLDER.

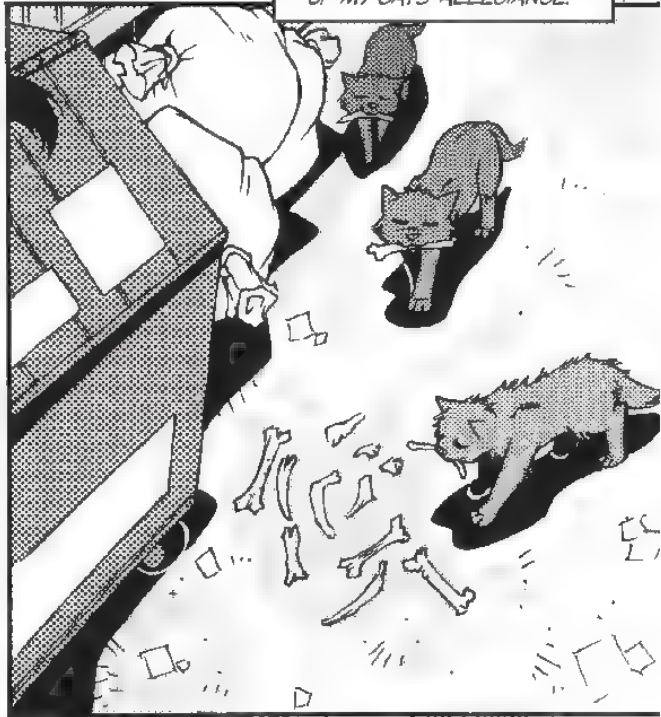
...AND I WELCOME IT.



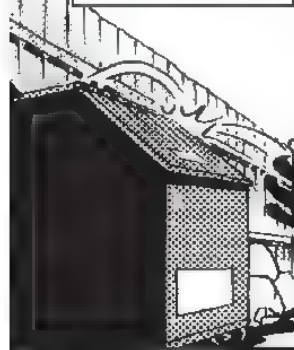
THINGS CHANGE AFTER I KILL
THAT ROGUE. EVERYBODY STILL
COMES TO ME WITH THEIR
PROBLEMS, THAT'S FOR SURE...

... BUT NOW THEY
COME BEARING GIFTS,
TROPHIES.

I DON'T ASK WHERE THEY
GOT THESE THINGS, OR HOW. I
JUST ACCEPT THEM AS SIGNS
OF MY CATS' ALLEGIANCE.



I HAVE EVERYTHING
I EVER WANTED.



CONTROL OVER EVERY
STRAY CAT IN TWOLEGPPLACE.
NO CAT COMES HERE WITH-
OUT MY SAY SO.

I KNOW OF EVERY KIT
THAT'S BORN, AND
THEY ALL FEAR ME.



AND YET I AM STILL
NOT CONTENT.



THAT NIGHT I GET A SERIOUS SHOCK, WHEN BRICK AND BONE TELL ME I HAVE VISITORS.

MORE CATS WITH PROBLEMS, I FIGURE. I TELL THEM TO SHOW THESE VISITORS TO ME...

...AND MY EYES ALMOST LEAP OUT OF MY HEAD! IT'S SOCKS AND RUBY!

SO IT'S TRUE!

TINY—I MEAN, SCOURGE—OUR HOUSEFOLK MOVED AWAY AND ABANDONED US

WE DON'T KNOW HOW TO GET OUR OWN FOOD. WILL YOU HELP US? PLEASE?

I LET THEM HANG FOR A LONG MOMENT. THEN:

WHY SHOULD I?

BUT...BUT SCOURGE... WE'RE YOUR LITTERMATES!

DOESN'T BLOOD MEAN ANYTHING?

MY OWN CATS BARELY HAVE ENOUGH TO EAT. IT'S NOT MY PROBLEM IF YOU'RE TOO STUPID AND WEAK TO FEED YOURSELVES



OH YES. BLOOD IS EVERYTHING. BUT THE ONLY BLOOD I'M INTERESTED IN FLOWS FROM MY ENEMIES. LOOK AROUND YOU!

THESE CATS ARE BATHED IN BLOOD. IT SOAKS THEIR FUR AND LAPS AT THEIR PAWS. THIS IS WHY WE SURVIVE!

WE ARE **BLOODCLAN!**



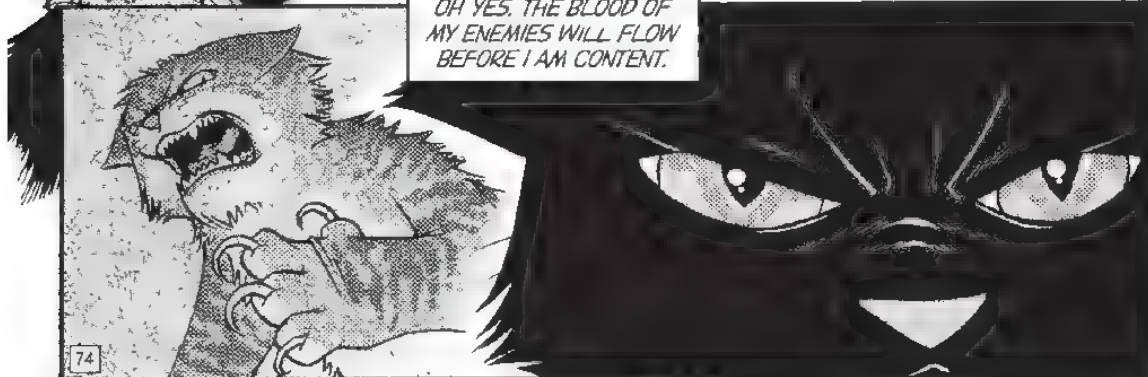
I CAN TELL MY WORDS ARE LOST ON THEM. I LET THEM EAT.

BUT AS SOON AS THEY FINISH...

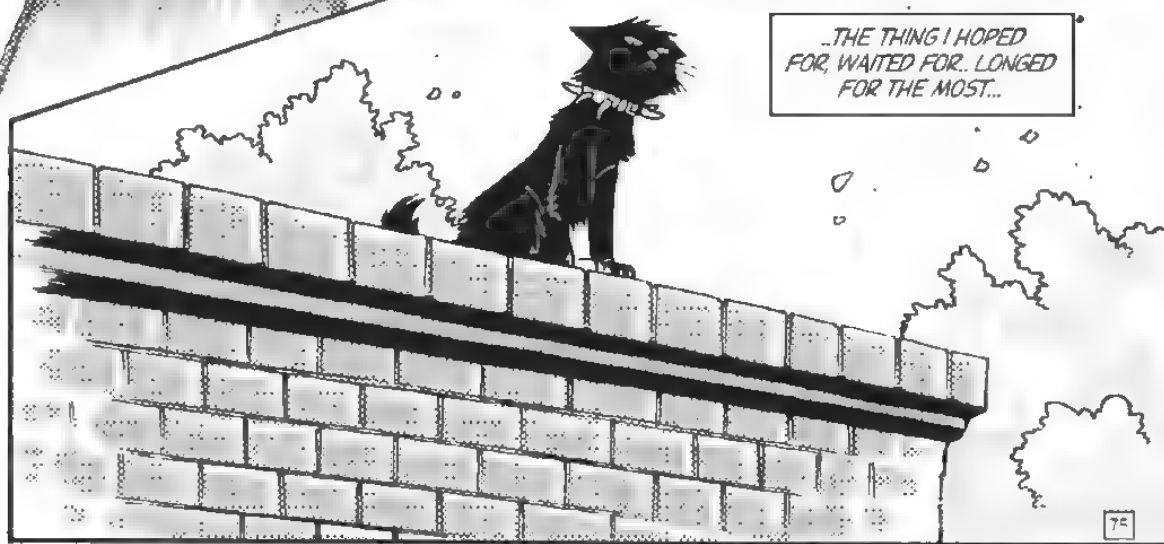
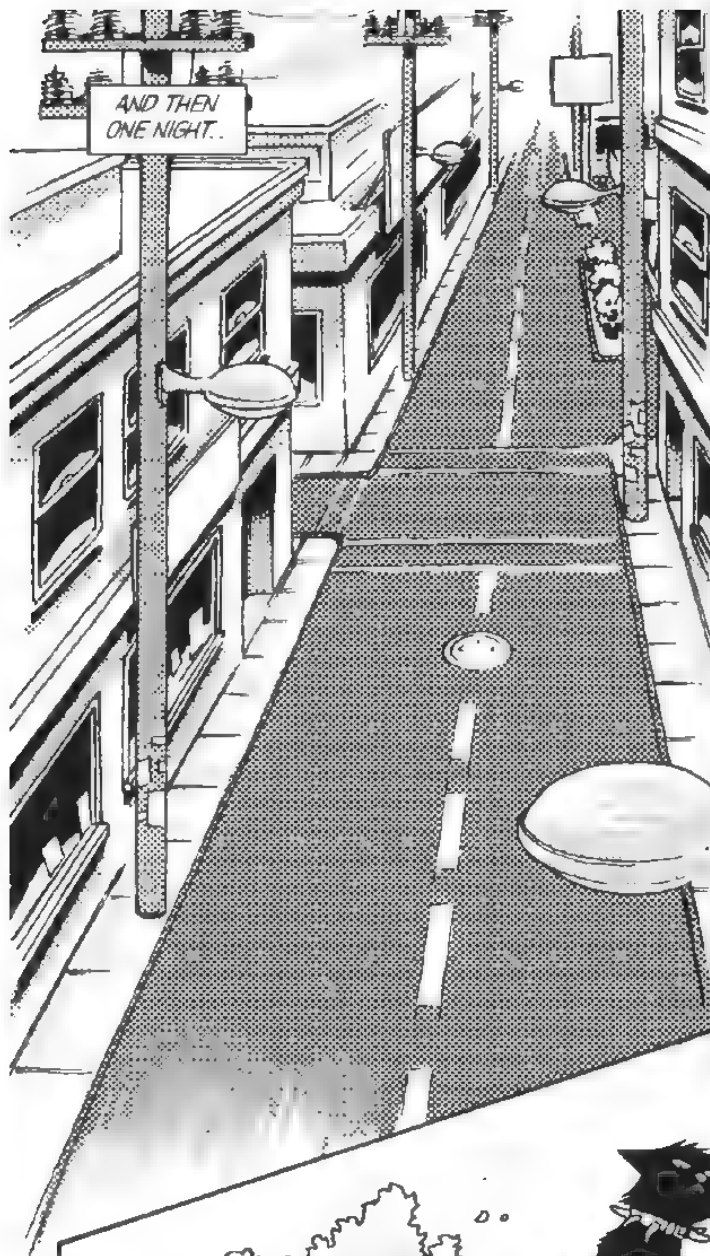


GET THESE TWO OUT OF MY SIGHT. THEY ARE NOT WELCOME IN BLOODCLAN TERRITORY.

YES, SCOURGE.



OH YES. THE BLOOD OF MY ENEMIES WILL FLOW BEFORE I AM CONTENT.







I MEASURE THE CONTEMPT IN HIS EYES AS HE WALKS PAST MY CATS. THAT WILL NOT BE FORGOTTEN EITHER.

THERE'S SCOURGE

THAT'S SCOURGE? HE'S NO BIGGER THAN AN APPRENTICE!

SHHH! THIS MAY NOT BE A CLAN AS WE KNOW IT, BUT THESE CATS WOULD KILL IF THEIR LEADER ORDERED THEM TO.

IT SEEMS I HAVE VISITORS. I WASN'T EXPECTING TO SEE YOU AGAIN, BOLDLER. I HEARD YOU'D GONE TO LIVE IN THE FOREST.

YES, SCOURGE, I HAVE.

SO WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? HAVE YOU CHANGED YOUR MIND AND COME CRAWLING BACK? DO YOU EXPECT ME TO WELCOME YOU?

NO, SCOURGE. IT'S A GOOD LIFE IN THE FOREST. THERE IS PLENTY OF FRESH-KILL, NO TWOLEGS—

SO WHAT DO YOU WANT?



I AM TIGERSTAR,
THE LEADER OF
SHADOWCLAN.

"TIGERSTAR" EXPLAINS THAT HE
HAS ENEMIES IN THE FOREST. IN
EXCHANGE FOR MY HELP...


...HE WILL GIVE ME
A PORTION OF THE
TERRITORY THERE

IT'S AN INTRIGUING SITUATION. I CAN
TELL THE TIME FOR TIGERSTAR AND
ME TO SETTLE OUR...DIFFERENCES...
HAS NOT ARRIVED.

AND I HAVE
A PROPOSITION
FOR YOU.

NOT QUITE YET.

BUT I CAN BE PATIENT.



EVENTUALLY THE WORD
COMES TO ME: BLOODCLAN IS
NEEDED IN THE FOREST

I GATHER MY FORCES AND MOVE, LEADING THEM
AWAY FROM TWOLEGPLACE AND INTO THE WOODS.

AND THERE
AT LAST.



THE TIME...

...IS...

...RIGHT.



MY LITTERMATES SAID I WAS
TOO SMALL...TOO WEAK. BUT I'VE
PROVEN THEM WRONG.

I'VE LEARNED HOW TO BE STRONG...
HOW TO LIVE FOR BLOOD. BECAUSE
THAT'S THE KEY. THE ONLY ANSWER.

I AM LEADER OF BLOODCLAN.
I AM SCOURGE.



AND I HAVE WON!

ERIN HUNTER

is inspired by a love of cats and a fascination with the ferocity of the natural world. As well as having great respect for nature in all its forms, Erin enjoys creating rich mythical explanations for animal behavior, shaped by her interest in astrology and standing stones. She is also the author of the Seekers series.

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WARRIORS

TIGERSTAR & SASHA



INTO THE WOODS

HARPER COLLINS

ERIN HUNTER

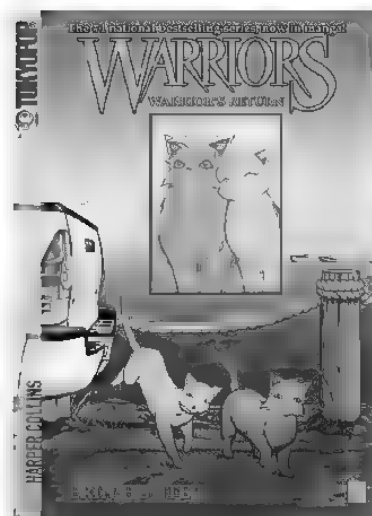
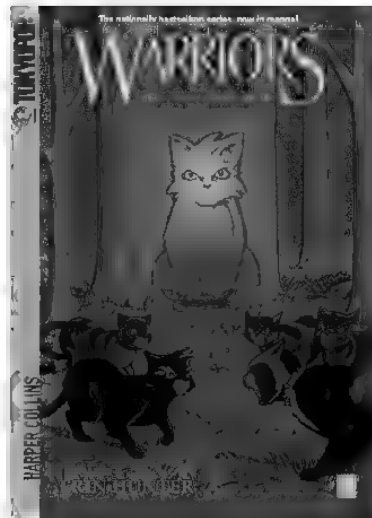
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KEEP WATCH FOR

WARRIORS

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#1: INTO THE WOODS

Sasha has everything she wants: kind housefolk who take care of her during the day and the freedom to explore the woods beyond Twolegplace at night. But when Sasha is forced to leave her home, she must forge a solitary new life in the forest. Life on her own is exciting at first but quickly gets lonely. When Sasha meets Tigerstar, leader of ShadowClan, she begins to think that she may be better off joining the ranks of his forest Clan. But Tigerstar has many secrets, and Sasha must decide whether she can trust him.



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POWER OF THREE
WARRIORS
BOOK 4:
ECLIPSE

TURN THE PAGE FOR A PEEK
AT THE NEXT WARRIORS NOVEL,
WARRIORS: POWER OF THREE
#4: ECLIPSE.

Firestar's grandchildren have learned of the powerful prophecy that foretells their destinies, and the responsibility of deciding the Clans' future weighs heavily on the three apprentices. Each secretly yearns for power, and their strengths are tested when ThunderClan is suddenly attacked—and all the Clans are thrown into a battle unlike any the cats have seen.

Jaypaw touched his nose to Tawnypelt's pad. It felt hot and fat. "Swollen," he pronounced. "The skin's grazed but not bleeding. But you already know that." He could hear Hollypaw's and Lionpaw's faint mew as they headed away to find prey. Were they talking about the prophecy?

Tawnypelt pulled her paw from under his muzzle. "I knew I couldn't taste blood but I wasn't sure if a stone had worked its way in." She licked it. "My pads have grown so hard from the mountains, I can't tell calluses from cuts anymore."

"No stones," Jaypaw reassured her. He nodded toward the sound of water babbling over rocks nearby. "That stream doesn't sound too deep. Go stand in it. The cold water should ease the swelling."

He padded after her and heard the splash as she leaped into the water.

"It's cold!" She gasped.

"Good," he mewed. "It'll take down the swelling quicker." He pricked his ears. Hollypaw's and Lionpaw's

voices had faded into the distance. He had shared with them the secret he had carried with him for so long. Telling it had felt like walking through unknown territory, each word falling like a pawstep on uncertain ground. Lionpaw had accepted it as though something that had been confusing him had finally been explained. Hollypaw's reaction had been more frustrating: She seemed only concerned about how they could use their powers to help Thunder-Clan, and kept fretting about the warrior code. Didn't she understand that the prophecy meant more than that? They had been given a power that stretched far beyond the boundaries set by ordinary cats.

Tawnypelt's mew interrupted his thoughts. "This water's *very* cold."

"It's mountain water."

"I can tell," Tawnypelt meowed urgently. "My paws have gone numb!"

"Well, get out then."

With a sigh of relief, she landed beside him and began shaking the water from her paws, scattering icy drops on his fur.

Jaypaw shivered and moved away; mountain winds and cold water were a bad mix. "Does it still hurt?"

"I can't feel it at all," Tawnypelt replied. She paused. "Actually, I can't feel any of my paws."

Squirrelflight was padding toward them. "Any better?"

"I think so," Tawnypelt meowed uncertainly.

Jaypaw felt his mother's tongue lap his ear. "Are you okay, little one?" she asked gently.

He ducked away crossly. "Why shouldn't I be?"

"It's okay to be tired." Squirrelflight sat down. "It's been a hard journey."

"I'm fine," Jaypaw snapped. His mother's tail was twitching, scraping the gritty rock. He waited for her to make some comment about how much harder the journey must have been for him, being blind and all, and then add some mouse-brained comment about how well he had coped with the unfamiliar territory.

"All three of you have been quiet since the battle," she ventured.

She's worried about all of us! Jaypaw's anger melted. He wished he could put her mind at rest but there was no way he could tell her the huge secret that was occupying their thoughts. "I guess we just want to get home," he offered.

"We all do." Squirrelflight rested her chin on top of Jaypaw's head and he pressed against her, suddenly feeling like a kit again, grateful for her warmth.

"They're back!"

At Firestar's call, Squirrelflight jerked away.

Jaypaw lifted his nose and smelled Hollypaw and Lionpaw. He heard claws scrabbling over rock as Breezepaw arrived. The hunters had returned.

"Let's see what they've caught!" Tawnypelt hurried to greet the apprentices.

Jaypaw already knew what they'd caught. His belly rumbled as he padded after her, the mouthwatering smell of the squirrel, rabbit, and pigeon filling his nose. If only it wasn't going to be given to the Tribe.

Crowfeather, Firestar, and Brambleclaw were already clustered around the makeshift fresh-kill pile. Stormfur and Brook hung back as though embarrassed by the gift.

"This rabbit's so fat it'll feed all the to-bes," Squirrelflight mewed admiringly.

"Well caught, Breezepaw," Firestar purred.

Jaypaw waited for the WindClan apprentice's pelt to flash with pride, but instead he sensed anxiety claw at Breezepaw. *He's waiting for his father to praise him.*

"Nice pigeon," Crowfeather mewed to Lionpaw.

Breezepaw stiffened with anger.

"And look at the squirrel I caught!" Hollypaw chipped in. "Did you ever see such a juicy one?"

"Come see!" Tawnypelt called to Stormfur and Brook.

The two warriors padded over.

"This will be very welcome," Stormfur meowed formally.

"The Tribe thanks you." Brook's mew was taut.

Jaypaw understood their unease. By accepting fresh-kill, they were openly admitting their weakness. Hunting was poor in the mountains now that two groups of cats were sharing the territory. And yet Jaypaw could feel

fierce pride pulsing from Stormfur. There was a core of strength within him, a resolve that Jaypaw had not sensed before, as though he were more rooted in the crags and ravines than he ever had been beside the lake. *He feels this is his destiny.* The Tribe were Stormfur's Clan now. *There's more than just the mountain breeze in his pelt.* He had been born RiverClan, and lived with ThunderClan, but now it seemed that he had found his true home.

Jaypaw shivered. The wind had been sharpened by a late-afternoon chill.

A howl echoed from the slopes far above.

Brook bristled. "Wolves."

"We'll get this prey home safely," Stormfur reassured her. "The wolves are too clumsy to follow our mountain paths."

"But there's a lot of open territory before you reach them," Firestar urged. "You should go."

"We should all head home," Crowfeather advised. "The smell of this fresh-kill will be attracting all the prey-eaters around here."

Alarm flashed from every pelt as Jaypaw detected a strange tang on the breeze. It was the first wolf scent he'd smelled. It reminded him of the dogs around the Twoleg farm, but there was a rawness, a scent of blood and flesh, to it that the dogs did not carry. Thankfully, it was faint. "They're a long way off," he murmured.

"But they travel fast," Brook warned. The rabbit's fur

brushed the ground as she picked it up.

"We're going to miss you," Squirrelflight meowed. Her voice was thick with sadness.

Brook laid the rabbit down again, a purr rising in her throat. Her pelt brushed Squirrelflight's. "Thank you for taking us in and showing us such kindness."

"ThunderClan is grateful for your loyalty and courage," Firestar meowed.

"We'll see you again, though, won't we?" Hollypaw mewed hopefully.

Jaypaw wondered if he would ever return to the mountains. Would he meet the Tribe of Endless Hunting again? He had followed Stoneteller into his dreams and been led by the Tribe-healer's ancestor to the hollow where ranks of starry cats encircled a shimmering pool. He shivered as he recalled their words: *You have come*. They had been expecting him and they had known about the prophecy! Yet again, Jaypaw wondered where the prophecy had come from, and how the Tribe of Endless Hunting were connected to his own ancestors.

"There's no more time for good-byes!" Crowfeather's mew was impatient.

"Take care, little one." Brook's cheek brushed Jaypaw's before she turned to say good-bye to Hollypaw. Stormfur licked his ear. "Look after your brother and sister," he murmured.

"Bye, Stormfur." Jaypaw's throat tightened. "Good-bye,

Brook.” He remembered the times when Brook had comforted and encouraged him. She had always seemed to understand what it felt like to be different. And Stormfur had never patronized him, but treated him with the same warmth and strictness as he had the other apprentices. He would miss them.

Lionpaw pushed in front of him. “Good-bye, Stormfur. Show those invaders that a Clan cat is never beaten.”

“Good-bye, Lionpaw,” Stormfur murmured. “Remember that even though our experiences change us, we have to carry on.”

A rush of warmth seemed to flood between the warrior and apprentice and Jaypaw realized with surprise that his brother shared a special bond with Stormfur, one he had not detected before. He stood wondering about it as his Clanmates began to move away down the slope while Stormfur picked up the freshly caught prey and headed uphill, after his mate.

“Stop dawdling!” Crowfeather nudged him with his nose, steering him down a smooth rocky slope onto the grassy hillside.

Jaypaw bristled. “I don’t need help!”

“Suit yourself,” Crowfeather snapped. “But don’t blame me if you get left behind.” He pounded ahead, his paws thrumming on the ground.

I'm glad I'm not Breezepaw! Imagine having such a sour-tongued warrior for a father.

"Hurry up, Jaypaw!" Lionpaw was calling.

Jaypaw sniffed the air. On this exposed slope it was easy to tell where the other cats were. Firestar led the way downhill, Breezepaw at his heels, while Crowfeather had already caught up and was flanking Tawnypelt, keeping to the outside of the group. Squirrelflight and Brambleclaw padded side by side, brushing pelts, while Hollypaw and Lionpaw trotted behind.

Jaypaw raced after them. The grass was smooth and soft beneath his paws. "It feels strange leaving them behind," he panted.

"They chose to stay," Crowfeather pointed out.

"Do you think we'll ever see them or the Tribe again?" Tawnypelt wondered.

"I hope not," Crowfeather answered. "I don't want to see those mountains again as long as I live."

"They might visit the lake," Hollypaw suggested.

A howl echoed eerily around the crags far behind them.

"They have to get home safely first," Lionpaw murmured.

"They will," Firestar assured him. "They know their territory as well as any other Tribe cat."

Padding beside his littermates, Jaypaw caught the

musty scents of forest ahead. Before long the ground beneath his paws turned from grass to crushed leaves. The wind ceased tugging at his fur as trees shielded him on every side. Hollypaw hurried ahead as though she already scented the lake beyond, but for a moment Jaypaw wished he was back on the open slopes of the foothills. At least there, scents and sounds were not muffled by the enclosing trees and there was no undergrowth to trip him up. He felt blinder here in this unfamiliar forest than he had ever before.

"Watch out!" Lionpaw's warning came too late and Jaypaw found his paws tangled in a bramble.

"Mouse dung!" He fought to free himself but the bramble seemed to twist around his legs as if it meant to ensnare him.

"Stand still!" Hollypaw was racing back to help. Jaypaw froze, swallowing his frustration, and allowed Lionpaw to drag the tendrils from around his paws while Hollypaw gently guided him away from the prickly bush.

"Dumb brambles!" Jaypaw lifted his chin and padded forward, more unsure than ever of the terrain but trying desperately not to show it.

Wordlessly, Hollypaw and Lionpaw fell into step on either side of him. With the lightest touch of her whiskers Hollypaw guided him around a clump of nettles and, when a fallen tree blocked their path, Lionpaw warned

him with a flick of his tail to stop and wait while he led the way up and over the trunk.

As Jaypaw scrabbled gratefully over the crumbling bark he couldn't help wondering: *Was the prophecy really meant for a cat who couldn't see?*

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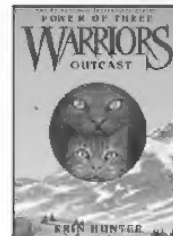
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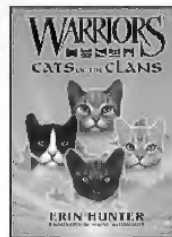
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